

Interpretation

A JOURNAL OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Winter 1994–95

Volume 22 Number 2

- 157 Yuval Lurie The Cultural Predicament in Biblical Narrative
- 181 Paula Reiner Whip, Whipped, and Doctors: Homer's *Iliad* and Camus' *The Plague*
- 191 John C. Kohl, Jr. Design in the *Iliad* Based on the Long Repeated Passages
- 215 Judith A. Swanson The Political Philosophy of Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound*
- 247 John C. McCarthy Pascal on Certainty and Utility

Discussion

- 271 Will Morrisey Strengthening Social Contract Theory: *Justice and Modern Moral Philosophy*, by Jeffrey Reiman

Book Reviews

- 283 Leslie G. Rubin *A Companion to Aristotle's "Politics,"* edited by David Keyt and Fred D. Miller, Jr.
- 285 Will Morrisey *The World of the Imagination: Sum and Substance*, by Eva T. H. Brann
- 289 Robert Sokolowski *Possibility, Necessity, and Existence: Abbagnano and His Predecessors*, by Nino Langiulli
- 295 Stephen M. Krason *The American Presidency: Origins and Development, 1776–1990*, by Sidney M. Milkis and Michael Nelson

Interpretation

- Editor-in-Chief Hilail Gildin, Dept. of Philosophy, Queens College
Executive Editor Leonard Grey
General Editors Seth G. Benardete • Charles E. Butterworth •
Hilail Gildin • Robert Horwitz (d. 1987) •
Howard B. White (d. 1974)
- Consulting Editors Christopher Bruell • Joseph Cropsey • Ernest L. Fortin
• John Hallowell (d. 1992) • Harry V. Jaffa • David
Lowenthal • Muhsin Mahdi • Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr.
• Arnaldo Momigliano (d. 1987) • Michael Oakeshott
(d. 1990) • Ellis Sandoz • Leo Strauss (d. 1973) •
Kenneth W. Thompson
- European Editors Terence E. Marshall • Heinrich Meier
Editors Wayne Ambler • Maurice Auerbach • Fred Baumann
• Michael Blaustein • Patrick Coby • Edward J. Erler •
Maureen Feder-Marcus • Joseph E. Goldberg • Steven
Harvey • Pamela K. Jensen • Ken Masugi • Grant B.
Mindle • James W. Morris • Will Morrisey • Charles
T. Rubin • Leslie G. Rubin • Bradford P. Wilson •
Hossein Ziai • Michael Zuckert • Catherine Zuckert
- Manuscript Editor Lucia B. Prochnow
Subscriptions Subscription rates per volume (3 issues):
individuals \$25
libraries and all other institutions \$40
students (four-year limit) \$16
Single copies available.
Postage outside U.S.: Canada \$4.50 extra;
elsewhere \$5.40 extra by surface mail (8 weeks
or longer) or \$11.00 by air.
Payments: in U.S. dollars AND payable by
a financial institution located within the U.S.A.
(or the U.S. Postal Service).

THE JOURNAL WELCOMES MANUSCRIPTS IN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY AS WELL AS THOSE
IN THEOLOGY, LITERATURE AND JURISPRUDENCE.

CONTRIBUTORS should follow *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 13th ed. or manuals
based on it; double-space their manuscripts, including notes; place references in the
text, in endnotes or follow current journal style in printing references. Words from
languages not rooted in Latin should be transliterated to English. To ensure
impartial judgment of their manuscripts, contributors should omit mention of their
other work; put, on the title page only, their name, any affiliation desired, address
with postal/zip code in full, and telephone. Contributors using computers should, if
possible, provide a character count of the entire manuscript. Please send THREE
clear copies.

Composition by Eastern Composition, Inc.,
Binghamton, N.Y. 13905 U.S.A.
Printed and bound by Wickersham Printing Co.,
Lancaster, PA 17603 U.S.A.

Inquiries: Patricia D'Allura, Assistant to the Editor,
INTERPRETATION, Queens College, Flushing, N.Y.
11367-1597, U.S.A. (718)997-5542

Sidney M. Milkis and Michael Nelson, *The American Presidency: Origins and Development, 1776–1990* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1990), xiv + 430 pp., \$37.95 cloth, \$18.95 paper.

STEPHEN M. KRASON

Franciscan University of Steubenville

The authors claim that this book is “the first comprehensive one volume history of the presidency to be written by political scientists in more than fifty years.” In fact, I don’t know of any others in print. This work, in my judgment, is a welcome contribution to the literature on the presidency.

The book consists of fourteen chapters: the first two deal with the historical background to the creation of the presidency and the debates about the office at the 1787 Convention and during the ratification period; the next eleven discuss the development of the office from George Washington to George Bush, with full chapters devoted to the individual presidents who were most pivotal in shaping the character and role of the presidency; and the final chapter discusses the vice presidency. The Preface informs us that most of the book was originally written by Milkis; Nelson drafted the two chapters on the creation of the presidency and that on the vice presidency.

Two good aspects of this book are its use of a historical and institutional approach to the study of the presidency, as opposed to the quantitative, psychological, power, and policy approaches that we have had such a heavy dose of in recent decades, and the fairly detailed attention it gives to the founding of the office and the Constitutional Convention.

The discussion of the origin of the presidency includes a brief discussion (one wishes it were longer) of the British, colonial, and state constitutional precedents for executive power, and then provides very good coverage of the proposals, debate, and action on the executive at the Convention. The book is particularly helpful in explaining how each of the various constitutionally specified powers of the president was agreed to. Most of the long chapter on the Convention is derived from a careful analysis of original source material (Fertrand’s *The Records of the Federal Convention*). An old, important secondary source, Thach’s *Creation of the Presidency, 1775–1789*, also is cited in a few places. The inclusion of a discussion about the formation of and debate on the vice presidency, during both the Convention and the ratifying period, is welcome, since it is normally omitted from historical accounts of both the creation of the presidency and of the forming of the Constitution generally.

The bulk of the book, of course, is about the individual presidents. As men-

tioned, it focuses on the ways in which each man who was held the office shaped the future direction of the institution or, at least, the particular contributions he made to it or the significance of his tenure for its role in American politics. The book at minimum touches on the highlights of all the presidential administrations and the political currents that affected each; thus the reader gets a flavor of the character of each administration. Again, the most thorough treatment is given to the presidents the authors judge—with reasonable accuracy—to have had the greatest effect in shaping the role of the office, which generally means having enhanced or consolidated its power or some aspect of its role and function in American politics. The book does not give a summary, much less a detailed discussion, of the initiatives, policy accomplishments, or even major national events of each administration. Nor does it provide a biography of or, in most cases, elaborate on the personal strengths and weaknesses of each president. These considerations are not pertinent for the authors' purpose. In my judgment, however, the book would have been even better and had additional value if more biographical material and historical detail (for more than just the most significant presidents) had been included. Nevertheless, information is plentiful enough to make this a quite satisfactory historical text for use in a course on the presidency, either at the graduate or undergraduate level. While it is commendable that the authors do not make Barber-like claims that a president's childhood predicts his White House performance, the dearth of attention to the character traits of individual presidents makes their treatment at times seem overly abstract and detached. The experience of such recent presidents as Lyndon Johnson, Nixon, and Carter shows character traits to be an important factor in presidential success and, moreover, an important element in what goes into the shaping of statesmanship.

One of the great strengths of this book is its insightful explanation of why some common historical perceptions of different presidents were incorrect: for example, that Lincoln's undertaking of extraordinary powers during the Civil War was "dictatorial," that the string of weak or mediocre Republican presidents after Andrew Johnson achieved nothing of value for American government, and that the brief, scandal-plagued administration of Harding was a complete failure and devoid of genuine accomplishments.

Another of the book's pluses is that it does not overemphasize the role of Franklin D. Roosevelt in shaping the present-day presidency. The authors note that the rise of the current era of presidential leadership began not with FDR—which, as they note, many political scientists contend—but with his cousin Theodore Roosevelt. TR and Woodrow Wilson "began the practices that strengthened the president as the nation's popular and legislative leader" (p. xii). More fundamentally, however, the authors emphasize that the "institutional characteristics" the office has come to assume, even in recent history, by and large had their roots in the Constitution itself.

While the book is a fair, well-researched, objective study and is scholarly

and nonpolemical in tone, there are some places where the authors' left-of-center perspective manifests itself. For example, the Vietnam War and America's general commitment to South Vietnam are viewed as a mistake; there is no sense manifested that America may have undertaken a morally worthwhile effort in opposing Communist totalitarianism (which showed its ruthlessness after it finally took control of South Vietnam). The same attitude is evident in the brief comment about Kennedy's Bay of Pigs undertaking. Irrespective of the practical and prudential considerations regarding this undertaking, was seeking to liberate Cuba from communism something that can merely be put down as a result of Kennedy's "immaturity" in the presidency (p.300)? The Watergate affair is evaluated in the typical liberal manner as having threatened the Republic. It is claimed that it "threaten[ed] the civility and public trust upon which any government must depend" (p.316). When discussing Reagan, the authors show a typical liberal reading (a *misreading*, in my judgment) of American public opinion in claiming that the Bork Supreme Court defeat "testified to the widespread public resistance to the Reagan administration's social agenda" (p.345). Fortunately, such ideologically revealing passages are not abundant.

It is laudable that in a book such as this a chapter on the vice presidency was included. The growth in both the responsibility and importance of the vice presidency in recent decades is well chronicled and explained.

The book includes a useful appendix summarizing the vote in all our presidential elections and a fairly complete index. It regrettably lacks a bibliography.

All told, Milkis and Nelson have produced a fine, informative, useful history of the presidency. Congressional Quarterly Press is to be commended for bringing into print a book such as this which seems to fill an obvious void. Besides being a valuable classroom text as a supplement to a more general text on the current presidential office it is a handy reference tool. One only hopes it will be kept in print (as, unfortunately, Congressional Quarterly Press's equally valuable book of a few years ago on the history of Congress was not) and periodically updated.