

links love with self-knowledge and friendship” (p. 87). Since humans are incomplete and need speech for “not merely reminding, but generation” (p. 94), Socrates tells Phaedrus that we need a “rhetoric [that] indicates the necessity of adjusting speeches to the souls of one’s listeners” (p. 94). This requires friendship; how else to know the soul of one’s interlocutor? This would also seem to completely condemn the written word, but Nichols suggests that Socrates’ criticism of writing is not wholly damning, for “writing dialogues that leave questions, or laws that leave room for application to individual cases” (p. 146) can create opportunities for “conversation” with readers-as-friends.

We still need to understand what a friend *is* and thus must turn to the *Lysis*. Nichols reads the dialogue more optimistically than does David Bolotin, arguing that the dialogue presents friendship “as a standard for philosophy [and political community] insofar as friends remain separate, while they belong together” (pp. 154–55). In other words, friendship is essential for the philosophic life that can come ever closer to completing us (for the alienated person will remain forever divorced from truth) and “saves us from alienation while preserving our own identity” (p. 215). Friendship “offers support for our complex identities as human beings and citizens” (p. 190).

While Nichols makes a compelling case for her readings, her case would be even stronger if she highlighted examples of friendship in action in the dialogues. For example, the guests in the *Symposium* let Socrates speak “in his own way” because “[t]hey are either remarkably polite or they want to hear what he has to say” (p. 57). Both possibilities are plausible (the first represents an interesting example of saying nothing), but there is a third option: The others consider Socrates their friend and are happy to allow him to speak however he pleases. Elsewhere she writes that “Phaedrus only wants to hear the speech and does not care whether he sees the speaker” (p. 101). However, she does not address the possibility that it might only be *because* Phaedrus and Socrates are already friendly that Phaedrus would be willing to listen to the speech without seeing Socrates’ face. It seems that this ability to trust and overlook quirks is an important part of the friendship that allows Socrates to reach out to his fellow citizens.

This does not detract overmuch from Nichols’s rich readings. Her argument that these three dialogues form a unified teaching on the importance of friendship and that Socrates is a proponent of friendship, not alienation, is convincing and an important contribution to the literature. She advances a high standard for rhetoric in political life and makes a case for conversational rhetoric that augments similar arguments in the democratic theory literature. In doing so, she joins Kochin in understanding that the relationship between friendship and rhetoric helps drive the prospects for genuine popular government.

**Civic War and the Corruption of the Citizen.** By Peter Alexander Meyers. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008. 376p. \$29.00.  
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This is the first volume of a trilogy entitled *Democracy in America after 9/11*. Given the trilogy’s title and the author’s location (Paris), Peter Alexander Meyers’s project inevitably points the reader back to Alexis de Tocqueville’s nineteenth-century account of the American democratic experience. While Tocqueville looked to America and saw a postaristocratic future, Meyers looks to America and sees what could be called a postpolitical future. His focus (at least in this volume) is on the American constitutional system, the position of the citizen, and the role that emergency powers have accorded the executive in the past century. What he sees is not good.

For Tocqueville, how the American union would respond to a national crisis was an open question. The experience of the War of 1812 suggested to him that private selfishness and a weak central government would eventually overwhelm a sense of the common good and deplete our ability to persevere in any drawn-out crisis. In the course of the last century or so, Meyers argues, it has become clear that the danger is not that the system will be unable to face and sustain itself in a national crisis, but that the executive has found a way to use the language of crisis to assert and expand itself in disturbing and dangerous ways. In contrast to the title of the trilogy, this is not just a story (at least in this volume) of what has happened to America since 9/11. As Meyers emphasizes, the roots of our present situation are found not only in the Cold War but also in developments that go back to the early part of the twentieth century (and, one could argue, back to the Civil War).

If Tocqueville’s *idée fixe* was equality, that of Meyers is the notion of emergency. Every day our political lives (as well as many other aspects of life) are colored by the idea that we are in a constant state of emergency. Crisis is no longer episodic; it is the very medium within which our political engagements are conducted. We have created a “culture of emergency” (p. 128). What was an open question for Tocqueville has been answered with a vengeance by the executive’s realization that national emergency can simultaneously motivate action and reduce subjects to “docility and deference” (p. 144). Senator Frank Church (D-ID) pretty much got it right when he noted, decades ago, that “emergency government has become the norm” in the United States (p. 130).

For Meyers, the role of emergency in our constitutional and political life is not a confirmation of Carl Schmitt’s analysis of emergency power as an exception that is both inside and outside the law. Rather, the author’s point is that the institutional and cultural integration of emergency is not at all exceptional but is part and parcel

of the normal system. The president's power expands only with the complicity of the citizenry. The life of the Constitution is not Schmittian logic; it is the experience of actors who talk and respond to one another in a public space. Constitutional limitations are not formal but a function of how power is constituted and deployed by such actors.

From the perspective of the citizen, the culture of emergency has resulted in what Meyers calls *civic war* and the tendency toward monocracy. In contrast to the violent character of an armed engagement between combatants, civic war refers to the experience of citizens who are placed under the thumb of necessity and discouraged from exercising their judgment. Civic war refers not only to the level of social coordination and cooperation that is needed to support combatants but also to an ongoing "domestic way of life" in which the citizenry is reduced to complicity and silence. The violence of civic war is internalized by the repetition of images (the planes hitting the Twin Towers) and claims ("everything is different") that generate a continual fear that can be played upon and manipulated. Through the symbolic weight of the idea of crisis, the executive has found its opportunity to consolidate and unify power.

The president, however, cannot consolidate power alone. To explain why this is so, Meyers introduces the phrase "the division of action" to "hold emphatically before our eyes that all human action takes shape and force from a context composed of other human beings" (p. 22, fn.). Beneath our constitutional procedures is "the fundamental social fact" that citizens must also be brought along and transformed by the actions of the executive. "Civic war is a particular division of action" (p. 261). It is a division of action in which citizens are complicit in the executive's decisions. It is a form of corruption, a kind of political suicide in which the possibility for politics is being denied at the very time that politics is being engaged. For Meyers, the executive needs to play us just as the terrorist needs to play the government. In both cases, the goal is to leave the target speechless, stunned, and docile enough to carry forward someone else's agenda.

The author's general analysis of politics in America is partly fueled by his disdain for and criticism of the Bush administration. But if what he sees as the fanaticism of that administration is taken to intensify the tendency towards monocracy, the lessons Meyers draws are meant to describe both a more enduring state of American political culture and a possible source of renovation. In the former case, his analysis would suggest that the symbolic use of emergency in our current economic situation is yet another data point consistent with the trajectory of civic war. And yet, while the Obama administration has secured vast powers over huge American corporations, the opposition has continued in its vigorous appeal to the people (or, what Meyers calls the "publicizing" of a political contest). At least for the moment, the ubiquitous deployment of emergency in the cases of the economy, health care, and

the environment has left the opposition neither docile nor speechless. Perhaps in the culture of emergency, not all emergencies are the same.

In identifying a source of renovation, *Civic War and the Corruption of the Citizen* could be read as an advice-for-the-citizen book. Instead of providing a civic education in formal procedures, it urges citizens to exercise judgment and stand in opposition. However significant that advice may be, Meyers's focus on the *complicity* of citizens in the culture of emergency suggests that we (as citizens) get the government we deserve. That we can choose to act in the public sphere is certainly true. That ordinary citizens are complicit in the Bush administration's actions is a tougher sell, particularly in a crowded, complex, national political environment in which not only the other branches of government but also the media, the military, the bureaucracy, 50 states, corporations, and highly organized interest groups vie for attention. The citizen's position requires not merely judgment but information and the wherewithal to be heard. While the position of the citizen tells us something about executive overreach, it may not provide the widest vantage point for understanding our present circumstances or how to remedy them.

**Conceiving a Nation: The Development of Political Discourse in the Hebrew Bible.** By Mira Morgenstern. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009. 240p. \$65.00. doi:10.1017/S1537592709991733

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Mira Morgenstern describes her thesis in the last two paragraphs: "The centrality of political discourse to the creation of national identity is a logical prelude to the [Hebrew] Bible's view of leadership" (p. 200). This, of course, can be described only as an empirical argument. But she also insists that "the ancient Biblical narratives about nationality and establishing communal discourse are not just stories of a bygone era," and that, if one approaches the key texts "dynamically, the Bible forms the key to help grapple with questions centering on the very deepest concerns of security and freedom that continue to challenge the lives of all on this planet" (pp. 201–2). These comments generate two quite different questions about Morgenstern's arguments, and the priority that one gives to them may well depend on the disciplinary backgrounds and sensibilities brought to this book in the first place.

The first question will be asked by those whose deepest interest (and knowledge) is about the Hebrew Bible itself and its understanding: To what extent does the author sustain her argument not only about the "centrality of political discourse," which at times seems almost to suggest a biblical precedent for what we today call "deliberative democracy," but also about its relevance to the creation and maintenance of a specifically defined Jewish or Israelite nation some 2,500 to 3,500 years ago? I am not professionally