



Hollywood Westerns and American Myth: The Importance of Howard Hawks and John Ford for Political Philosophy (Castle Lectures Series)

By Robert B. Pippin

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In this pathbreaking book one of America's most distinguished philosophers brilliantly explores the status and authority of law and the nature of political allegiance through close readings of three classic Hollywood Westerns: Howard Hawks' *Red River* and John Ford's *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* and *The Searchers*.

Robert Pippin treats these films as sophisticated mythic accounts of a key moment in American history: its "second founding," or the western expansion. His central question concerns how these films explore classical problems in political psychology, especially how the virtues of a commercial republic gained some hold on individuals at a time when the heroic and martial virtues were so important. Westerns, Pippin shows, raise central questions about the difference between private violence and revenge and the state's claim to a legitimate monopoly on violence, and they show how these claims come to be experienced and accepted or rejected.

Pippin's account of the best Hollywood Westerns brings this genre into the center of the tradition of political thought, and his readings raise questions about political psychology and the political passions that have been neglected in contemporary political thought in favor of a limited concern with the question of legitimacy.

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Editorial Review

Review

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"A trenchant and illuminating study of three great Westerns and a convincing case for their importance both to political psychology and to our own self-understanding as American citizens."--C. D. C. Reeve, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

--C. D. C. Reeve

"Robert Pippin's study of three great Westerns is a fine meditation on the place of heroism in democracy and the ambiguous relationship between legend and history in the making of heroes. It can stand with the best recent books on the Western as a genre, but it is driven by a thought all its own: the difficulty of the search for order, and the elusive "possibility of an American politics."--David Bromwich, Yale University--David Bromwich

About the Author

Robert B. Pippin is the Evelyn Stefansson Nef Distinguished Service Professor in the John U. Nef Committee on Social Thought, the Department of Philosophy, and the College at the University of Chicago.

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