

interpretation

A JOURNAL OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

May & Sept. 1984 Volume 12 Numbers 2 & 3

- 141 Robert Sacks The Lion and the Ass: a Commentary on the Book of Genesis (Chapters 44–50)
- 193 Kent Moors Justice and Philosophy in Plato's *Republic*: the Nature of a Definition
- 225 Marlo Lewis, Jr. An Interpretation of Plato's *Euthyphro* (Introduction; Part I, Sections 1–3)
- 261 Jack D'Amico The *Virtù* of Women: Machiavelli's *Mandragola* and *Clizia*
- 275 Jim MacAdam Rousseau's *Contract* with and without his *Inequality*
- 287 David Boucher The Denial of Perennial Problems: the Negative Side of Quentin Skinner's Theory
- 301 David Schaefer Libertarianism and Political Philosophy: a Critique of Robert Nozick's *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*
- Discussion*
- 335 Laurence Berns Spiritedness in Ethics and Politics: a Study in Aristotelian Psychology
- 349 Ernest Fortin Rational Theologians and Irrational Philosophers: a Straussian Perspective
- 357 Stanley Corngold & Michael Jennings Walter Benjamin / Gershom Scholem
- 367 Charles M. Sherover The Political Implications of Heidegger's *Being and Time*: on Heidegger's "Being and Time" and the Possibility of Political Philosophy by Mark Blitz
- 381 Mark Blitz Response to Sherover
- Book Review*
- 387 Will Morrisey *Algeny* by Jeremy Rifkin
- Short Notices*
- 391 Will Morrisey *How Democratic is the Constitution? and How Capitalistic is the Constitution?* edited by Robert A. Goldwin & William A. Schambra; *Statesmanship: Essays in Honor of Sir Winston S. Churchill* edited by Harry V. Jaffa; *Winston Churchill's World View* by Kenneth W. Thompson; *Richard Hooker and the Politics of a Christian England* by Robert K. Faulkner; *Education and Culture in the Political Thought of Aristotle* by Carnes Lord; *Machiavelli's New Modes and Orders: the Discourses on Livy* by Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr.; *Rousseau's Social Contract: the Design of the Argument* by Hilail Gildin; *Rousseau's State of Nature: the Discourse on Inequality* by Marc F. Plattner

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Volume 12 numbers 2 & 3

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Design & Production Martyn Hitchcock

Annual subscription rates individual \$13; institutional \$16; student (3-year limit) \$7. INTERPRETATION appears three times a year.

Address for correspondence INTERPRETATION, Queens College, Flushing, N.Y. 11367, U.S.A.

Authors submitting manuscripts for publication in INTERPRETATION are requested to follow the *MLA Style Sheet* and to send clear and readable copies of their work.

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Response

MARK BLITZ

United States Information Agency

I

The purpose of my book was “to discuss the underlying meaning, possibility, and intelligibility of the concepts and distinctions—for example theory and practice, wholes and parts, ends and means—that ultimately control the range and precision with which politics and morality can be understood.” My method was to examine the implications for these concepts and for political philosophy of Heidegger’s *Being and Time*. I attempted to subject Heidegger’s discussion to rigorous analysis in order to uncover its full radicalism.

Two of my chief conclusions were: (1) that one can find a ground for a critical understanding of “Heidegger’s conception of Being and Man precisely” by attempting “to bring Heidegger’s discussion to bear on the question of the possible subject matter and study of politics” and (2) that it is possible that “Plato and Aristotle’s understanding of man, rethought in light of the issues raised by Heidegger, properly accounts for the phenomena he discusses while illuminating areas he leaves in the dark.” My criticism was “exploratory, not dogmatic” because it did not “pretend to be conclusive where it is only tentative.”

I will discuss first Sherover’s misinterpretation of much that I say, then indicate some flaws in his understanding of Heidegger, and conclude by turning to the last half of his essay.

Let me begin by pointing out a few of the inaccuracies in Sherover’s account of my book.

(1) Sherover claims that I take “no cognizance” “of Heidegger’s tremendous respect before Aristotle.” Not so: see pp. 60ff., the footnote on p. 60, and the whole book for that matter. He states as well that I mention Aristotle and Kant “as an afterthought” after “claiming Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Husserl and Dilthey” as “four prime influences on Heidegger.” This is an odd misunderstanding of the passage in question (p. 20), where I say that Heidegger “develops” themes of the first four and then say that he also “develops” themes of the other two. My point—very obviously stated—is that to try to write about Heidegger by writing about his philosophical context would take us behind his immediate predecessors, back to Aristotle and beyond. To do justice to such a context, I said, would require a book very different from mine. Therefore I say that I will begin with Heidegger himself, discussing others when necessary. As it turns out, I mention Kant and Aristotle more than any other thinkers, as the index makes clear. Sherover and I clearly have a different view of the substance of Heidegger’s relationship to Kant and Aristotle, but the importance of that relationship is manifest and I say so.

(2) Sherover claims on p. 3 and throughout that I invoke “transcendent platonism,” or make other statements without “argument, justification, or even citation.” In fact, I do make arguments and point to phenomena that support my suggestions. They may not convince Sherover, but they are there. The thrust of my use of Plato and Aristotle is spelled out explicitly on p. 17 of my book. Sherover either ignores what I say or forgets it as he reads on.

(3) Sherover claims that I confuse the distinction between possibility and potentiality. (Because he does not develop the distinction it is hard to say what he has in mind.) As evidence he cites my pp. 117 and 194. But these pages are summaries of *Being and Time*. More than once Sherover claims that I am confused and his evidence turns out to be passages where I am closely paraphrasing Heidegger’s own words. I conclude from this not that I am confused about Heidegger or that Heidegger is confused about Heidegger, but that Sherover is confused about Heidegger.

(4) Sherover claims that I do not say which “traditional analyses” I have in mind when I am considering the implications of Heidegger’s discussion of readiness to hand. (He quotes my p. 61.) But I say so clearly and by name (e.g., Hobbes and Machiavelli).

(5) Sherover seems surprised that I can say on p. 73 that possibility cannot be understood as inferior to actuality or necessity. As it turns out, p. 73 is part of my exposition of Heidegger’s discussion of “understanding.” I invite anyone to look at *Being and Time* pp. 143–44. They will discover what Heidegger says and why I paraphrase him as I do.

(6) Sherover on p. 5 quotes me as saying that justice, moderation and courage cannot be understood “as Dasein’s possibilities.” What I in fact say is: “the Being of entities such as justice, courage, and moderation is not *exhausted* (my underlining here) by understanding them as Dasein’s possibilities” (pp. 92–93; see also p. 64). My point is that none of the modes of Being Heidegger discusses in *Being and Time* is sufficient to grasp justice, etc. I then briefly discuss why and add to my discussion later in the book. Sherover misinterprets my point by leaving out the “exhausted,” acts as if the seven pages after p. 92 were not written, and then accuses me of *ex cathedra* pronouncement.

(7) Sherover is incredulous that I “insist” that the three ecstases of temporality are temporalized equally (p. 160). I say this because Heidegger says it, often (e.g., p. 329). I do not deny that the future has priority in Heidegger’s analysis; I affirm it in the very passage from which Sherover quotes (see again p. 329). The question is: is the primacy of the future the heart of what is most significant in Heideggerian temporality, or is the heart the unity of temporality? (Is the heart of *Dasein* understanding or is the heart care as a whole?) This is a matter for further discussion. To discuss it fruitfully one should pay more attention than I think Sherover has to Heidegger’s remarks about the ecstases’ unity and equiprimordiality, to my section on Heidegger’s discussion of understanding, and to my chapter on his discussion of death and authenticity.

(8) Sherover accuses me of misapprehensions about Heidegger's view of temporality, after a strange paragraph on p. 370. If his point is to dispute my statement that the full temporality of the structures of Being does not "come to light explicitly in *Being and Time*" then I simply ask him, or anyone, to read the final section—and particularly the final paragraph—of *Being and Time*.

(9) Sherover points to my "seemingly deliberate refusal to recognize Heidegger's continued attempt to develop Kant's transcendental turn . . ." But on the exact page from which he has just quoted (230), I point to this very fact. Though Sherover makes too much of "Heidegger's Kantianism," about which more later, he is clearly entitled to argue that my interpretation of the relation is incorrect. But it is misleading to claim that I do not recognize what I do recognize, in this passage and others. (I refer to Kant more than to any other author.)

(10) Sherover acts as if I think that Heidegger attempted to "redo pre-Critical speculative theory." But I make abundantly clear that Heidegger believed himself to be doing something much more radical (see, e.g., p. 61). I also make clear there that Heidegger did not treat Being as a cause. On the other hand, the meaning of causality is a key problem in Heidegger's work in general.

(11) Sherover says that I claim that "Heidegger has nothing to say to ethics, new or old (p. 203)." I say no such thing. In the passage to which he refers I am discussing the concept of authenticity. The paragraph immediately after this passage continues my discussion, from a new point of analysis.

(12) Sherover's brief analysis of my treatment of Heidegger and the Nazis seems to imply that I concluded "merely that one cannot derive from Heidegger a political philosophy 'of the best regime,'" (p. 217) and did not attempt to discuss how the author of *Being and Time* could support the Nazis. But I did discuss this, and reached some conclusions (pp. 217–22).

(13) Sherover believes that the conclusions in my "Conclusion" appear 'out of the blue.' This is only because he did not attend properly to the body of the book. I could have keyed my conclusion to the rest of the book but thought it unnecessarily pedantic.

II

Sherover's misinterpretations arise from his belief that he already knows what is important in Heidegger and therefore knows how a discussion of Heidegger should proceed. He thus lacks the patience both to follow a critical argument beyond one or two steps, and to see what Heidegger himself is saying.

His obvious basic error concerning *Being and Time* is to identify Heidegger too closely with Kant. He therefore fails to come to grips with what is radical in Heidegger's thought. Anyone acquainted with Kant and Heidegger can see Kant's importance to *Being and Time*. But Heidegger's questioning of Kant is also manifest! Kant did not grasp the Being of the human subject; Kant did not

radically connect Being and time; Kant did not root morality and conscience in an appropriate understanding of human Being. In the last analysis Kant understood man to be a present at hand entity: he did not bring into play the whole nexus of death, guilt, and transcendence to world that characterizes Heidegger's analysis. In a word, Kant did not provide an ontology of *Dasein*. Heidegger explicitly differentiates himself from Kant often, and at length in sections 6 and 64.

Heidegger says at different times that fundamental ontology = transcendental knowledge = disclosing Being as transcendence = philosophy = hermeneutic understanding = phenomenology. His point quite clearly is that none of these possibilities is precisely what it hitherto has been thought to be. One should no more argue that when Heidegger says that "Being is transcendence *schlechthin*" he is to be equated with, say, Thomas, than one should misconstrue his connection to Kant because he talks of transcendental philosophy. Similarly, when Heidegger says that time is more 'subjective' and 'objective' than any possible subject or object, he has just finished saying that time is neither a subject nor an object. It requires only elementary subtlety to recognize that Heidegger does not believe time to be some sort of super subject but, rather, that he is attempting to uncover an interpretation beyond, but yet at the core of, the possibility of categories such as subject and object.

I doubt that Sherover simply identifies Heidegger with Kant, but it would be instructive to see whether he could systematically clarify the differences without being forced to uncover a Heidegger less Kantian than the one he describes here. (Of course, he is also free to argue that Heidegger sees nothing that Kant does not see as or more clearly. But to make such an argument successfully he would need to clarify why Heidegger discusses at length phenomena that Kant does not examine fully or at all and show by pointing to specific phenomena where Heidegger is deficient.)

Sherover's failure seriously to confront my argument also arises from the spirit which could speak as he does of "questions which any phenomenological approach must foreclose at the outset." (Let us pretend for the moment that Sherover correctly understands transcendental analysis, phenomenology, and Heidegger's relation to them.) Sherover appears to dismiss out of hand the possibility that the Greeks or any pre-Kantian can offer a genuine alternative to Heidegger (or Kant). But this possibility cannot be dismissed out of hand. There is nothing about the question of conditions of possibility—the heart of transcendental philosophy according to Sherover—that is in principle philosophically unintelligible to the pre-Kantian. To sustain such a claim one would need to examine the phenomena. But Sherover points to nothing in particular which was simply beyond the Greeks' ken. Yet the question which he claims is foreclosed is the question of Heidegger's justification for his own enterprise. How remarkable if such a question were foreclosed in a book called *Being and Time* whose body is an analysis of human being! How revealing if the analyses in the book distorted such a question! One must not subject Heidegger to hasty pieties. But one

also must not, in looking at him, take flight from basic matters. How can we grasp him at all without pointing to the things themselves? Rather than ignoring 'transcendental' thinking, I attempted throughout my book to keep before me the "Heideggerian" and "transcendental" issues of finitude and the proper manner in which to account for the prior intelligibility of entities. I concluded that "practical and philosophical activity can both be understood as finite precisely in reference to the fact that the intelligibility of human activity is finally rooted in the perfection that men seek to imitate; I have held that the phenomena of openness, striving, imitation, can be interpreted in the light of this perfection without interpreting man as present-at-hand in the natural scientific sense, as a tool, or as an entity that can be perfectly fulfilled. Moreover, I have argued that the phenomena of the prior intelligibility of entities with which we deal concretely, phenomena that Heidegger interprets in terms of *Dasein*, can be grasped sufficiently by this alternative analysis."

III

The last half of Sherover's essay might have provided a useful backdrop against which to discuss important issues.

Unfortunately, as a discussion of political matters that claims to be rooted in Heidegger, it is flawed in many ways. First, Sherover has said that he has "no answer" to the "good philosophic questions" of how the author of *Being and Time* could have been 'taken in' by "National Socialism." But how could someone with no answer to this question even begin to presume that he understands Heidegger's relevance for politics? Even though Sherover misinterprets it, he believes my discussion of Heidegger and the Nazis to have some merit. Perhaps that discussion indicates some validity in the rest of my analysis, on which it is based?

Second, Sherover claims Heidegger to be guiltless of "utopianism." In fact, Heidegger's political judgment is both immoderately restrained and immoderately assertive, Its immoderate assertiveness ignores the limits placed both on political action and on the effectiveness of philosophic understanding. Such assertive blindness is the very embodiment of "utopianism."

Third, Sherover acts as if his discussion of freedom agrees with Heidegger. But he shifts in an unwitting and un-Heideggerian manner between ontic (or existensuell) and ontological (or existential) discussions, and once more treats Heidegger as essentially identical to Kant.

Fourth, Sherover has nothing to say about fate and destiny, which are central to Heidegger's historical analysis. Fifth, he has nothing to say about Heidegger's discussion of the "people" and the "public" and invokes 'deliberation' without considering the importance of readiness to hand. Being-in-the-world, dying, guilt, resoluteness, conscience—where are they in his discussion of a freedom

and responsibility supposedly based on Heidegger? In general, Sherover's discussion of the relevance of *Being and Time* to political philosophy has little to say about *Being and Time*. In contrast, I attempted to discuss the implications for political philosophy of all these Heideggerian concepts and analyses, and did not limit myself to the areas to which Sherover sometimes says that I did limit myself. But, after all, I had a book and he has but a few pages, so, in fairness, we will turn to the final topic.

As a discussion of political matters in its own right, Sherover's essay is also unfortunately empty. As usual, it is more Kantian than Heideggerian, but it is Kant without much hint of Kant's moral and legal toughness. Sherover makes no distinction between social and political discussions. He says nothing of rule, hierarchy or production. He leaps from discussing the broadest ontological freedom and individuality to statements about more concrete individuality. He asserts the importance of this deep freedom without examining any alternatives to its primacy. He says nothing about reason or the passions, referring only to deliberation. He assumes the significance of history without seeing that much that he calls historical or temporal in the Heideggerian sense refers to ordinary change and variation and that where these need deeper analyses there are alternatives to the one he offers. He moves blithely from claims about "temporality" to conclusions about everyday affairs. His discussion as a whole leads up to the truism that politics should pay attention to individual responsibility, and that how it should do this must be prudentially gauged. And yet, he in no way argues convincingly that this truism can be grounded in the conceptual apparatus he employs. He announces the discovery that justice can be a possibility for us only if we are free to choose it, without wondering how it must be so that it can be choiceworthy. He simplistically assumes that the possibility of unchanging standards is no problem for Heidegger. One would think that Sherover had never heard the term 'will' and had never heard that both it and Heidegger had a more than accidental connection to the Nazis.

Sherover merges talk of 'values' and 'ideals' as if they were the same, and as if analyses based on 'values' were not anathema to Heidegger. He talks of legitimacy but neither gives evidence of knowing what it means politically, nor of how discussion of legitimate governments differs from discussion of the common good of political communities. He suddenly applies "transcendental reasoning"—"looking for the grounds of enabling possibility"—in "earlier sources" and issues an interpretation of Plato's *Crito* that acts as if a discussion of "individual consent" and a "right" to resign could grasp the political or philosophical heart of the dialogue. More, he once again jumps simplistically from ontological to mundane, acting as if such consent and "free expression" are unmediated moral expressions of "transcendence as freedom."

On the whole, the implications for political philosophy of Heidegger's *Being and Time* are more challenging than readers of Sherover's essay would discover.