

interpretation

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Volume 15 numbers 2 & 3

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Robert H. Horwitz, 1923–1987

WILL MORRISEY

In his class on modern political philosophy at Kenyon College, Bob Horwitz told a story on himself. He recalled walking along a street in Chicago at night with his friend Herbert Storing, when some youths, out to intimidate, ran directly at the two professors. (These were not former students.) “Storing stood there like a real man,” Bob said, illustrating this by planting his own feet firmly and expanding his chest. Then, his enormous eyes widened in mock terror, he shuffled a few steps to the left, narrowed his eyes in a sideward glance, and muttered, “I got off the sidewalk. . . .”

He was teaching undergraduates the difference between Aristotelian citizen and Hobbesian man. The lesson worked: I have remembered, and now you probably will, too. But Bob left the teaching unfinished, with respect to himself. Sixteen years later, back at Kenyon for his memorial service, I learned that Bob had won the Bronze Star in World War II. His laugh came back to me then; it always sounded as if Santa Claus had read Machiavelli — not losing his liberality but putting a surgical edge on it. At the service, Bob’s student, colleague, and friend Phil Marcus said, “Bob Horwitz was always more than most saw, until it was too late.”

Robert Henry Horwitz was born in El Paso on September 3, 1923, and he remained a kind of Texan all his life. He thought big. He talked and acted to back up those thoughts, for the sake of them and the friends who shared them. He didn’t talk or act for the sake of just anybody, having a Texan contempt for “the pusillanimous and the timid, the compromisers, and the like,” as he himself once put it. A student wrote that Bob “knew two things I didn’t: how to have enemies and how to have fun. Preferably at the same time.”

Bob learned early how to reconcile contraries, or balance them. He grew up in Tennessee, a Jewish Southerner in the 1930s — a minority of a minority, both minorities sometimes embattled. This must have given him a certain distance from, but a nonetheless passionate interest in, the workings of the political order. It surely prepared Bob to appreciate the response made to the political order by a supremely intelligent man, John Locke, whose careful way of writing was to be rediscovered by Leo Strauss. By striking coincidence or providence, Bob’s confirmation statement concerned the relation of John Locke’s thought to the Declaration of Independence. The fruitful tension, the artful contradiction, the occasional outright conflict: Bob learned these not from books or teachers at first, but by experience in a southern prep school, in the European war, at Amherst College, in New York, where he studied piano at the Juilliard School, met his match and wisely married her, and then in Hawaii, where he undertook the Sisy-

phean task of teaching adult education! He learned the Lockean lesson of tolerance, and of the limits of tolerance—the latter not only in the war but especially in 1948, when Stalin's troops crushed Czechoslovakia and harshly taught at least one Henry Wallace-style student about the evil of leftist totalitarianism.

At the University of Chicago, Leo Strauss took Bob's knowledge, acquired by reconnoitering a wide, sometimes rough terrain, and elevated it so Bob could see the whole all at once and measure its proportions. Strauss taught Bob what philosophy is, and what political philosophy must be, if philosophy is to survive. Bob never forgot these lessons. Out of them he fashioned a life with friends, sometimes in collaboration with fortune's wheel, as often in conflict with it. With respect to fortune if not friendship, neither the ancient nor the modern stance could quite satisfy Bob. So he assumed either one, as circumstance required and prudence advised. He didn't lose his balance.

Almost all the work Bob did during and after his years in Chicago concerned political philosophy's practical aspect or embodiment, civic education. In his doctoral dissertation he contrasted the ways Aristotle, Rousseau, and Dewey seek to educate citizens in various regimes. He sharply questioned Dewey's optimistic belief that "growth," conceived as the infinite expansion of democracy, could overcome the tension between city and man. Bob co-edited two books on modern ideologies, those attempts to make political structure and propaganda cohere with philosophy reconceived as science. Bob had a less than sanguine view of such schemes. He also had too much respect for 'the common man' to believe that citizens would sit still for enlightenment. And he knew too much about philosophy to imagine it identical to the propaganda of modern science, or even to regard it as well defended by that propaganda.

Bob particularly deplored the effect of modern social science methods. He was convinced that they narrow and vulgarize the way students conceive of politics, and thus ultimately debase the way politics are practiced. In his contribution to *Essays on the Scientific Study of Politics*, a book he conceived, he dissected the "scientific propaganda" of Harold D. Lasswell. Lasswell rejected the classical idea of political science as an architectonic art, but slyly subordinated scientific description and prediction to a program of social control by, as Bob called them, "psychologist-kings." Unlike Plato's philosopher-kings, Lasswell's ruling class was to be empowered only to wither away; the master propagandists eventually will so arrange human life, redo human nature itself through a sort of universal enlightenment, that no politics will be necessary any longer. This strange, simultaneous maximizing of tyranny and anarchy elicited Bob's vigorous condemnation, and he was struck by the equally vigorous condemnation the *Essays* provoked in professional journals, then firmly committed to 'behaviorism.' With Professor Strauss, Herbert Storing, and Walter Berns, Bob went through enemy fire in a different kind of war. He knew that simply to provoke that war, to force social scientism to defend itself on territory not its own, was to win a battle, if not the war.

Bob did some work that came close enough to the sort of work done by most contemporary political scientists to demonstrate clearly the difference between his understanding and theirs. In the mid-1960s, Bob published a series of monographs on land use and politics in Hawaii; a student of his in those days remarked that Bob showed how politics determined the use of the land, how “the very trees growing on the watersheds were the outgrowth of the regime.” Now more than twenty years old, these studies are still used by specialists, some of whom might learn from them things beyond their specialty, as might citizens and legislators.

Bob thought of his political science classes as opportunities for the civic education of his students, who could be depended upon not to have had much of that previously. During his ten years at Michigan State University, he conceived and taught courses on modern ideologies and on political philosophy. He worked with the University’s College of Education to establish courses on civic education itself. He did not confine his teaching to academia, but addressed state and federal legislators, secondary school teachers, military personnel, hospital administrators, Rotarians and Lions; he appeared on several radio programs and, at least once, on television.

Bob went to Kenyon College to serve as chairman of the political science department. In a letter written shortly before Bob’s death, Robert Goldwin recalled:

Kenyon then was probably the best liberal arts college in the country to have virtually no instruction in political studies at all. Under your leadership, we built the best undergraduate political science department in the country. It helped that we had a clean slate, but that was only part of it. Your “plan” was the essential element.

Before I left Chicago for Gambier, I tried to draw for Leo Strauss the little diagram you used to explain your plan for the department: a base of political philosophy; one pillar, our political system; the other pillar, other political systems; across the top, international relations. Strauss showed little interest in the diagram, and when I asked what he thought of Horwitz’s scheme, he said, “If there is a plan for the department, it is already better than all the others.”

Bob found the right people (among the first and surely the foremost in service to Kenyon, Harry Clor) to teach these subjects. Then he let them teach.

With Goldwin, he transplanted the Public Affairs Conference Center from Chicago to Kenyon. The PACC annual conferences brought prominent politicians, scholars, and journalists to Gambier, Ohio to educate (they started out by assuming) and to be educated (they quickly realized). With students he reversed this process, and stretched it out over their lifetimes. Later on, Bob worked with two young colleagues, Charles and Leslie Rubin, to develop a summer course on the teaching of political science, a course that distilled the lessons learned by the teachers at Kenyon during the years his “plan” was in effect. Now some version of that course, “The Quest for Justice,” exists at more than one hundred schools.

Bob’s scholarly work for the last fifteen years centered on John Locke, particularly Locke’s educational writings. Bob collaborated with Judith Finn on a

study of Locke's artful reworking of Aesop's Fables; he wrote on Lockean civic education for his anthology *The Moral Foundations of the American Republic*; and, in what will likely be recognized as his finest work, he wrote an introduction to and an extensive commentary on Locke's *Questions Concerning the Law of Nature*, to be published with scholarly apparatus by Diskin Clay and an English translation by Jenny Strauss Clay. Bob discovered missing portions of this manuscript (controversial portions Locke himself had hidden with various friends), and proved that they were intended to form part of the whole. In each of his essays Bob concerns himself not only with Locke's teaching but with how Locke taught and for whom Locke wrote. Locke was indeed an Aesopean writer whose life, as Bob demonstrates, mirrored some of the labyrinthine character of his writings. Locke's *Questions* were prepared for use in the university, where the philosopher addressed future English rulers with the consummate circumspection a theologically sensitive topic deserves.

Bob described Locke as his hero, and he did emulate Locke in some of this circumspection. But, as he immediately added, Bob was a friend to controversy as Locke was not, confessing that he "attempted to be unfailingly kind and generous in helping his friends, but could never understand the maxim that we should love our enemies." He saw that Locke's thought and influence had helped to make such spirited confrontations civil, but he also wanted to show that Lockean commercial republicanism need not extinguish all spiritedness, especially the spiritedness needed to defend the regimes of tolerance.

Bob's final controversy at Kenyon was a defense of civility in its academic form, liberal education. The same kind of ideology he had espoused in the 1940s, studied in the 1950s, and opposed on campus and within the American Political Science Association during the 'New Left' days of the 1960s and early 1970s, reappeared at Kenyon in the 1980s in the forms of feminism and 'globalism.' Their partisans wanted to transform liberal education into political education in the propagandistic sense, asserting that "all education is political," because they saw no difference between rhetoric and philosophy that is politic. Physically weakened by chronic illness, Bob gave his adversaries a few lessons in politics — both in his sense of the word and in theirs.

Both Aquinas and Hobbes teach that fear can lead to civility. As a founder in his own sphere, Bob read and taught Machiavelli and regarded it as an open question whether it is better to be loved or feared. I think finally he might have answered, "That depends upon the souls in question." In some he preferred to inspire fear, simply. In others, fear came first, but led to friendship or at least to respect. A very few others needed not to fear him at all — or, at least, not too much. Women students and colleagues had a certain advantage in this, because Bob never lost a degree of Southern courtliness, piquantly mingled with that U.S. Army / University of Chicago brashness. Bob was almost unique among my acquaintances in that I never met a woman who regarded him as an overgrown boy — as most women quite properly regard most men. To a woman, they

thought him a man, one of them going so far as to write, “You are drawn to the problems that separate the men from the boys.” If I ever discover how he managed this effect, I shall report back for the benefit of men everywhere.

Nor did men think of him simply as an intellectual warrior, although with us it often began that way: A professor who met him in 1980 recalled, “They told me he was older, he had mellowed, he was no longer as combative as he used to be. This may have been true, but I still found him exhausting.” But it wasn’t long before the laughter came, if you deserved to share it. One of his last students recalled how Bob “would defiantly fire a piece of chalk at a buzzing clock marking the end of class: time was short, and there were many important jokes which still needed telling.”

For a short time after Bob’s death, some of us worried that his commentary on Locke’s *Questions* might only exist in notes or in some unpublishable form. We were wrong; the manuscript was discovered, nearly complete, to be finished by several longtime co-workers. So it will be published thanks to both parts of Bob’s life as I knew it: his scholarly passion and his friendliness with those who shared his passion for knowing and his prudent but no less passionate care for the ways we come to know, and to wonder.