Philosophia (2006) 34: 209–221
DOI 10.1007/s11406-006-9016-x

CRITICAL STUDY

In Nietzsche's Shadow: Unenlightened Politics

The Seduction of Unreason: The Intellectual Romance with Fascism from Nietzsche to Postmodernism by Richard Wolin. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004, 400pp.

Hilliard Aronovitch

Received: 19 May 2006 / Accepted: 24 May 2006 /
Published online: 6 September 2006
© Springer Science + Business Media B.V. 2006

I

Prominent philosophers and other intellectuals have all too often lent support to tyranny and infamy. Documenting such cases is of obvious historical and moral importance, and it raises the question of whether the fault lies with a particular individual or a perverse set of ideas, or indeed both. How far, in other words, do the attitudes and actions of a wayward theorist or writer reflect the true content and meaning of the works for which he or she is well known and perhaps otherwise well-reputed? For that matter, to what extent are the political implications of a book or body of doctrine to be decided by the author's intentions, rather than by the logic or outcome of the ideas as followed up by others?

One major focus for these matters was provided by the discovery two decades ago of Martin Heidegger's extensive affiliation with the Third Reich, including endorsing Hitler and firing Jews as Rector at Freiburg. Richard Rorty, who had welcomed Heidegger's ideas, and Continental input, to his anti-foundationalist program in philosophy – the message of which is that we do not need metaphysical or other ultimate principles to support sound moral convictions and political commitments – wrote off these regrettable facts as owing to Heidegger's personality and particular leanings, not to his philosophical ideas which were treated as separate from the man and unblemished by him.[1] But that is surely to stretch the distance between theorist and theory to the point of incredulity. Others took a different

[1] See Rorty (1988, 1990, 2004).

H. Aronovitch (✉)
University of Ottawa, Ottawa K1N 6N5, Canada
e-mail: haron@uottawa.ca

view.[2] Richard Wolin, in *The Politics of Being: The Political Thought of Martin Heidegger* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), connected Heidegger's stances to his rejection of core liberal principles of the Enlightenment. Subsequently, Wolin (a Professor of History and Comparative Literature at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York) went on to explore the differing appropriations of and political responses to Heidegger's teachings by some prominent students in *Heidegger's Children: Hannah Arendt, Karl Löwith, Hans Jonas, and Herbert Marcuse* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). And now, Wolin's further researches have led to the work which is the subject of this critical study. The book's themes are aptly signalled in the title and the subtitle: *The Seduction of Unreason: The Romance with Fascism from Nietzsche to Postmodernism*. Or rather they are, provided one realizes that Wolin's argument includes under 'fascism', or flirtations with it, certain thinkers or movements on the Left whose ideas and assumptions echo, he thinks, the far Right. And the title and subtitle tell of what is to come provided also that one expects overlapping allegations about how certain major intellectuals made political missteps (or worse) and about how the very character of the ideas they espoused is the root of the trouble. This is to say that the book purports to offer both intellectual history and philosophical analysis, and so takes up positions on questions of the sort identified at the start.

In this book, Heidegger is left in the background and treated only briefly. An earlier figure, Nietzsche, who had loomed large for Heidegger himself, is regarded as the real fountainhead of the array of thinkers who are here presented as warring against reason and democracy. After exploring Nietzsche as the compass point for Counter-Enlightenment thinking, Wolin moves on to others who were deeply influenced by him and mirrored his dark ideas or simply did not see that political thought and practice should be inspired by very different sources. So, facts about and interpretations of Jung, Gadamer, Bataille, Blanchot, Foucault, Derrida and various others are sorted through for how they reveal a Nietzschean or similar derogation of norms of rationality, objectivity, and common humanity. And beyond intellectual figures, Wolin looks also to how the attitudes and political inclinations he is targeting are now seeing a popular resurgence in the form of a New Right in Germany and also in France, and are finding expression in various quarters in an extreme form of anti-Americanism that cheers the attacks of September 11, 2001 and condemns Western democracy as deserving to be undone or moved beyond.

Evidently, this is a book which takes on much, intellectually and practically, and seeks to link certain root ideas of the past with persisting trends of thought and disturbing orientations in the present. While there are things in each regard to be challenged, the book achieves much, and is admirable and important for its scholarship and its sense of what politically needs to be diagnosed on the dark side and invigorated as against it: the heritage of the Enlightenment.

[2] An early indictment comes from one of Heidegger's most famous students, Herbert Marcuse, who wrote to his former teacher in 1948 seeking some acknowledgment from Heidegger of what he had endorsed; none was received. Marcuse had admonished: "...we cannot make the distinction between the philosopher and the human being Martin Heidegger – it contradicts your own philosophy. A philosopher can be mistaken about politics – then he will openly admit his error. But he cannot be mistaken about a regime that murdered millions of Jews merely because they were Jews, that made terror part of everyday life and turned everything that ever was really tied to the concept of spirit and freedom and truth into its bloody opposite." Quoted in Schalow (1989), p. 124. See also Rockmore (1992). Rather than disassociating Nazism from the substance of his philosophy, Heidegger himself proudly asserted an essential connection, as Mark Lilla reports: "In 1936...Karl Löwith saw him in Rome, where he wore a Nazi lapel pin and explained to his former student how concepts in *Being and Time* had inspired his political engagement." See Lilla (2001), pp. 22–23, and similarly Wolin (1991), p. 10.

But questions should immediately be flagged concerning basic terms and inferences in Wolin's overall argument. Does challenging Enlightenment-minded notions of rationality and the like in fact constitute a unifying theme of the seemingly diverse figures he addresses? More fundamentally, is the turn away from the Enlightenment in fact a basis for sliding, to one degree or another, in the direction of 'fascism'? That last key term deserves scare quotes here precisely because its meaning or application is part of what is at issue.

Wolin touches on but does not really explore different theories of fascism nor even give a systematic account of the notion. However, he is evidently treating Nazism as the central case and what he means more generally is quite evident. Amongst theorists, he does mention favorably Zeev Sternhell, who is distinctive for maintaining that the real roots of fascism lie with French theorists and movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Georges Sorel's revolutionary syndicalism and Charles Maurras's intense nationalism);[3] while Wolin looks to sources in German thought. But Wolin agrees with Sternhell on the crucial point that fascism is a set of ideas whose existence must be traced to intellectual and cultural roots – That it is no mere unguided political program; and more specifically he agrees that the cultural roots are a reaction to the 18th-century Enlightenment, including the French Revolution in its pre-terror phase as one of its embodiments.

It is important to plot out this territory, as Wolin does not really do – perhaps because he presumes it is familiar – by identifying generally two aspects to the Enlightenment as it occurred in France (with the *philosophes*), in Germany (with Kant), in England and Scotland (with Locke and Hume), and elsewhere. There is both an epistemological component and an ethical-political component. The epistemological component centered on ideals of rationality and objectivity: that is, rationality regarded as independent of authority, and consisting of demonstration by discursive proofs or empirical experience; and objectivity regarded as the viewpoint of humanity in general, independent of particular traditions, classes, religions, nations, cultures, etc. The ethical-political component heralded individual rights and liberties, toleration, and social diversity, in all, what over time became liberal democracy.

So the Enlightenment, as a broad outlook and orientation amounting to more than the ideas of any specific thinkers, came under attack on one or both of two fronts. Critics challenged its epistemological ideals, emphasizing in their stead thought tied to particular historical or social conditions, and upholding knowledge or conviction based on sentiment and the need to accept ineffable elements of reality. In ethical-political terms, opponents were hostile to the spirit of individualism, and to a materialism apparently associated with it. They called for restoring or creating not a mere society but a genuine community, hierarchically or otherwise ordered. Some deemed democracy and the rule of law to be superficial or actually false norms, emanating from special interests of one sort or another. These counter or anti-Enlightenment stances could serve and did serve both the extreme Right and the extreme Left, depending on the precise tilt given to them, but their common target and often similar manifestations are what Wolin is drawing out. A bridging point between the political extremes, by now well-known, emerges from their shared denial of objectivity and discursive reason, and their embracing knowledge associated with sentiment and a particular group's point of view. In practice, the actual, embodied form of the 'truth' and 'rightful authority' comes to be identified with an elite few, or vanguard, or Führer. This is also to say that the inherent message or tendency of the extreme Left is to be found, as Talmon long ago argued, in the expressed logic and proclaimed objectives of the extreme Right (Talmon, 1970). Wolin correctly and valuably traces out further links in this chain.

[3] See Sternhell (1986); Sternhell, Mario Sznajder and Maia Asheri (1994).

But what about the more basic questions which arise, especially from noticing that the Enlightenment has both an epistemological and an ethical-political component? Why – as Wolin himself honestly asks (184) – suppose that attacking or veering away from the Enlightenment's ideals of rationality and objectivity sets one on the road to fascism? Indeed, why suppose that denouncing those specific ideals amounts to irrationalism, rather than a possibly more refined and defensible version of reason? For that matter, why implicate as a form of irrationalism, not to mention embryonic political extremism, projects which are critical of the Enlightenment for no more than its supposedly wrongheaded foundationalism? The answer to these various questions is that it depends on just what is attacked or rejected, as regards the Enlightenment's essential epistemological orientation, and in the name of what. Beyond challenging a specific and perhaps inflated notion of reason, the move to irrationalism, to unreason, comes when the very activities of discursive thought and logic are tossed aside or turned away from, and when the very appeal to reason and objectivity is decried as being a mask for domination and oppression. Then, when vision and truth are equated with the uncriticizable deliverances of sentiment and some ethnic outlook or racial identity, or proxy for these, and when essential protections and rights of individualism and the rule of law are castigated as cheap social veneer and acids that eat away at the real bases of civilization, when this collection of attitudes and inferences is embraced, then, truly, a refusal of the Enlightenment's intellectual values is of apiece with a rejection of its ethical-political ones, and the result is fascism or a slide towards it.

As he turns to particular thinkers, though, Wolin is not always careful to sort out and compile just which elements in this mix are or are not adhered to. So in assessing the ethical-political culpability that can be ascribed to doctrines, not just to the individual exponent's attitudes and actions, and at times in regard to assessing the culpability of individuals, nuance and degree are not clearly delineated. By way of general pronouncement, Wolin says this:

> It would be foolish to assert that all doctrines that radically question the primacy of reason exist in a symbiotic relation with forces of political reaction, let alone fascism. Nevertheless, it would be equally misleading to deny that one of fascism's central tenets entails a rejection of reason and all that it historically represents. (184)

Still, just as ordinary folly (or madness) can be either harmless and gentle or dangerous and malicious, so too can philosophical unreason take on these different forms, and it matters to distinguish cases in accord with their actual tendencies; and, always, to see where a thinker's actions are owing to his theory or to personal idiosyncrasy.

We cannot follow Wolin throughout all the instances he takes up in his survey, but must look instead to select ones, and notably first to Nietzsche, where the story starts. Nietzsche has always been an exceptional and enigmatic figure on the philosophical scene and in political life, and for many reasons. His writings were more literary and aphoristic than systematic and analytical; his personal circumstances were solitary, odd, and afflicted by psychological breakdowns and actual madness; and whatever he may have intended and his writings may have meant, he or at least certain views of his were welcomed by Hitler and the Nazis. However, on at least one key count Nietzsche can be exonerated, though Wolin is equivocal on this: Nietzsche was not anti-Semitic, having overcome any such negative tendency from his youth, but rather contemptuous of anti-Semites.[4] (His sister and one-time friend Wagner were the notorious culprits.)

[4] See Yovel (1998), and Wolin (1991), pp. 31–2 and 58.

The famous, or infamous, doctrines in Nietzsche's philosophy that made it an apparent ally of fascism include his dismissal of democracy, equality, and any concern for humanity in general as false values propagated by the weak, first in Judeo-Christian ethics and then in their secular, humanistic offspring; his theory of the will to power as the driving force of society and individual life; his heralding an ethic of nobility and heroic virtue for the few; his notion of higher types who are Supermen (or Overmen), and (56) his flirting with the notion of a master-race. Notwithstanding this strange brew, Nietzsche has been enormously influential for generations of thinkers in Germany, France, and elsewhere, including now in the Anglo-American world. Wolin is therefore surely right to make Nietzsche the focus for much that follows. Heidegger, Gadamer, Foucault, and Derrida are among the major figures who have taken it that to philosophize is to do so with or in any case in the aftermath of Nietzsche. This is well-known, and in ways also previously well-documented.[5] So also, as Wolin notices, is the refusal by some current Continental thinkers, such as Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut, to take Nietzsche as a model precisely because they recognize that the retrieval of humanism and the tradition of rights require looking in a very different direction (Ferry & Renaut, 1990, 1997). What Wolin contributes is an analysis of how attempts to take a lead from Nietzsche or learn from him are not only widespread but troubling whether they look to him just for a fashionable intellectual radicalism or even something supposedly more moderate. At least three readings of Nietzsche seek to disengage him from politically extreme implications: Walter Kaufmann denied any fascist aspect to Nietzsche's philosophy and even rendered him as a kind of liberal; Alexander Nehamas turned Nietzsche's project into a personal aesthetic one, of various styles, guises, and forms of self-transformation; while Connolly and others in the spirit of postmodernism see Nietzsche as the unmasker who rejects politically rigid structures and identities for the sake of celebrating ideological and cultural differences (Kaufmann, [1950] 1974; Nehamas, 1985; Conolly, 1991). But interpretations and appropriations of Nietzsche which are devoted to appreciating and taming his philosophy necessarily also misrepresent it, by detaching from it or downplaying some of its most central and explosive elements, those previously indicated and their furtherance in his emphasis on force and mastery, and his veneration of conquerors and bloodthirsty types from the past, including Napoleon and Cesare Borgia, and above all his denigration of any appeal to reasoning and values as a refuge from these positions. The use of Nietzsche in aid of Nazism may have been an abuse of much in his thought, but it must at least be insisted that anyone who draws inspiration from Nietzsche should beware. His extreme attack on essentials of the Enlightenment cannot easily have innocent implications.

Jung was among those who was not wary in this way; he relished in Nietzsche themes that reinforced anti-rational elements in his own thinking. We learn from Steven Aschheim's historical research of something Wolin rather surprisingly does not play up, "the marathon 1934–1939 Zurich seminar Jung held on *Zarathustra*."[6] In that extensive project, Jung combed Nietzsche's texts and came up with what he saw as explicit expressions and symbolic presentations of his own theory of the collective unconscious: He took Nietzsche to be articulating or foreshadowing the collective unconscious of the current (1930s) era in Germany as it was unfolding. In regard to it, Jung expresses what Aschheim deems "ambivalent views on Nazism" citing Jung's proclaiming, "One cannot help admitting that Fascism has done any amount of good for Italy," and that about what is

[5] See for example, Aschheim (1992); Schrift (1995).

[6] Aschheim (1992), p. 258. (As is well-known, Heidegger devoted his lectures in 1936–1940 to Nietzsche.)

happening in Germany "it is exceedingly difficult to judge. From one aspect things are positive, and from another, quite negative."[7] Aschheim, though, also reports, "There were times when Jung was explicitly critical of Nazism, portraying it as a misapplication of the Nietzschean world" and quotes Jung: "[Nietzsche] surely never dreamt he would be called the father of all this modern political evil."[8]

But what in Jung's theorizing allegedly offered an opening to or affinity with fascism? The rupture with Freud in 1914, after years of colleagueship and discipleship with him, provides essential clues. For Freud, psychoanalysis was conceived of (at least initially) as rigorous science and in practice was meant to be a form of personal liberation through the exercise of reason over the unconscious. By contrast, as Aschheim writes: "For Jung, of course, it was precisely Freud's individualist-rationalist bent that made Nietzsche the more incisive thinker, more attuned to the deeper realities."[9] The 'deeper realities' in Jung's terms were the collective unconscious with its group archetypes, and also the dynamism of pagan religion, including Teutonic images and myths, with which Jung became enthralled.[10] These are matters that Wolin stresses as part of exhibiting anti-Enlightenment premises. It is even the case that for a time Jung attributed to collective archetypes a racial twist, and thereby distinguished Aryan and Jewish characteristics to the detriment of the latter, at least by Jung's standards. The former was primordial and powerful, the latter was falsely cultured and rationalistic. But on balance Wolin concludes: "Though Jung was never an outright Nazi, his status as a fellow traveler, and, more importantly, the marked intellectual affinities between many of his ideas and the National Socialist worldview, remain troubling to this day" (76). That judgment, though, should be put alongside the earlier one by Walter Odanjyk who had written on Jung's politics. He concluded: "Thus, there may be some basis for allegations that, at least to begin with, Jung was not unsympathetic to National Socialism," but "although he made some serious errors, Jung was far from being a Nazi or anti-Semite."[11]

Hans-Georg Gadamer, the next figure Wolin discusses, is arguably a questionable case for Wolin's analytical-historical project. As the celebrated founder or prime exponent of the approach known as hermeneutics, Gadamer can claim to his credit a widely respected major work of contemporary philosophy with a humanistic thrust, namely, *Truth and Method* (1960), and, more importantly, although he lived through the era of the Third Reich, he was distant during it from the person and policies of his former teacher Heidegger, and so has been untainted by the much touted findings about Heidegger and others. Wolin treats Gadamer as indeed a very different case, but maintains that Gadamer nevertheless took positions and made compromises which necessitate a severe judgment, and while the terms of it vacillate from page to page (90, 93, 105, 118, 122–3), it is at times deliberately damning. That upshot is certainly controversial, and challengeable, notwithstanding that Wolin does deal in some detail with both Gadamer's doctrines and his actions.

Taking up doctrines first, we may add Gadamer's own bearings on them. In a retrospective on his time as a doctoral student, he writes:

> behind all the boldness and riskiness of our existential engagement – as a scarcely still visible threat to the romantic traditionalism of our culture – stood the gigantic form of

[7] Aschheim (1992), p. 259.

[8] Aschheim (1992), p. 261.

[9] Aschheim (1992), p. 55.

[10] See further, Noll (1994), on which Wolin draws.

[11] Odanjyk (1976), pp. 107–108. Consideration of these matters will in future have to include Bair's (2003) massive *Jung: A Biography*, which cannot be addressed here.

> Friedrich Nietzsche with his ecstatic critique of everything, including all the illusions of self-consciousness. Where, we wondered, was a thinker whose philosophical power was adequate to the powerful initiatives put forward by Nietzsche? (Gadamer, 1997a, p. 6)

The time was 1919, the place was Marburg, and the question as repeated by Gadamer even more urgently is then answered by him: "where was help for thinking to come from? Heidegger brought it."[12] Nietzsche and Heidegger: not, from what we now know, a politically reassuring pair. In combination they lead Gadamer to a wariness about the Enlightenment and an emphasis upon the rootedness of thought in non-rational elements or unexpressed assumptions. The project of hermeneutics is interpretation informed by the conviction that context and presuppositions are keys to thinking and to the meaning it may have which cannot in full be discursively conveyed or defended. Hence, the notions of 'prejudice' (in the sense of presupposition), 'tradition', and 'authority' as the focal points or ground of hermeneutics, ground which the Enlightenment, according to Gadamer, was wrong to expect that thinking could escape or should transcend. Those focal points are therefore intended by Gadamer not as pejoratives but as unavoidable and humanly defining constituents of forms of understanding. To critics, the implication is one of entrapment in relativism, in fixed ways of life and forms of thought, but Gadamer rejects that as his intention. We share with others 'horizons of meaning' which are interstices for dialogue across cultural differences and opportunities for critical self-consciousness. In reply to one commentator who suggests that Gadamer's lesson is to leave the Enlightenment behind, Gadamer adamantly replies that his aim, almost to the contrary, has been to reject only the notion of a naive and finished Enlightenment, and that hermeneutics, properly understood, is really the furthering of the Kantian undertaking as set forth in Kant's defining essay "What is Enlightenment?"[13] And so perhaps it may be.

Habermas, as one famous opponent, has resisted that prospect and seen in the notion of tradition a block or limitation to the ideal of open-ended rational discourse, and the politics supportive of it; though Gadamer continued to the last to say he was misunderstood by Habermas (Gadamer, 1997a, pp. 29–30). Wolin pushes this critique in insisting that fundamentals are forsaken by Gadamer. These are matters too extensive and fine-grained for us to settle here or even for Wolin to resolve definitively.[14] But there is a further crucial point about Gadamer's philosophical orientation that we should put on record. The most vital and meaningful contact with reality is taken to lie outside language and discursive thought:

> Naturally, the fundamental linguisticality of understanding cannot mean that all experiencing of the world can only take place as and in language, for we know all too well those prelinguistic and metalinguistic inner awarenessnesses, those moments of dumbfoundedness and speaking silences in which our immediate contact with the world is taking place (Gadamer, 1997a, p. 28).

However, does this emphasis on the non-rational and the ineffable, and the related idea of the historical rootedness of thought, which many philosophers (such as Wittgenstein) might affirm, have any significance for Gadamer's political attitudes and actions? Certain

[12] Gadamer (1997a), p.7.

[13] See Detmer (1997) and Gadamer (1997b).

[14] On these matters, appreciations and defences of Gadamer include McDowell (2002) and Taylor (2002). Gadamer aside, I myself have written favourably about the role of tradition in morals and politics, in Aronovitch (1996).

troubling ones in the Nazi era on which Wolin bases his accusations against Gadamer (and which have been researched by others, as he notes) deserve attention in their own right before leading us back to that question.

Five or so matters are of concern here, and it must be said at the start that often what is most disturbing about them are the explanations or excuses which Gadamer and his defenders have offered in regard to them: (1) in 1933 Gadamer lent his name to a declaration of professors in support of the National Socialist government which was used abroad for propaganda purposes. Gadamer, and his biographer Grondin, maintains that he did so together with all sorts of other non-Nazis, that the only likely alternative was emigration, and that the real future of Nazism remained still unknown (Grondin, 2003). (2) In 1934 Gadamer published an article which, Wolin contends, shows Gadamer interpreting in a favorable light Plato's view of the state with its expulsion of the traditional poets and its mandate for a new, politically oriented paideia. While "clearly, "Plato and the Poets" is hardly a Nazi text," Wolin writes (111), it "certainly gives pause" because of appearing at precisely the moment of the Nazi consolidation of power. "Whatever is to be said in explanation or defence of the article, it is a sorry thing to find Gadamer later claiming that a quotation from Goethe which he cited as an epigraph to it "documents my position *vis à vis* National Socialism," since its message, "Whoever philosophizes will not be in agreement with the conception of the times," at best says all too little in the context.[15] (3) In 1934–5 and 1935–6 Gadamer took over teaching positions from Jewish friends (Richard Kroner and Erick Frank) who were fired for being Jews. "It was not without some qualms of conscience that Gadamer availed himself of these opportunities," his biographer writes, and adds that there was nothing Gadamer could do about the basic situation and that "as a German who had to feed a family, he believed he had no other choice than to remain in Germany" (Grondin, 2003, pp. 162-3). (4) In 1935, to further advance his career when it was stalled, owing, it seems, to his being thought unsupportive of the regime, Gadamer voluntarily enrolled in a "political rehabilitation facility," and the effect of this initiative was his being granted a professorship previously denied him by a government office (99).[16] (5) In 1941, Gadamer gave a lecture, subsequently published as a monograph, entitled "*Volk* and History in The Thought of Herder" at The German Institute in Paris. This was a year after the German defeat of France; and the lecture was given to captive French officers. Wolin cites politically offensive and incriminating passages in the original lecture-monograph and underlines the further incriminating fact that Gadamer excised or altered these in a version which appeared decades later (116–117); as Jean Grondin also notes, citing among other such passages this one:

> the German concept of 'das Volk' – in contrast to the democratic slogans of the West – proves to have the power to create a new political and social order in an altered present (Grondin, 2003, p. 213).

In interpreting all this, care must be taken to avoid exaggerating Gadamer's actions or actual political stances and certainly to avoid misrepresenting his basic ideas. Of his actions and stances, what seems undeniable is that he was too often quiescent and on significant occasions opportunistic. Reading Grondin's generally favorable and at times all-too-friendly biography, which is to say, reading some points with appropriate extra emphasis or between the lines, confirms that.[17] However, Wolin's more severe indictments appear

[15] See Gadamer (1997a), p. 13.
[16] See also Grondin (2003), pp. 181–183.
[17] Wolin has reviewed Grondin's biography in Wolin (2003).

unduly harsh, and must be left for historians to assess. As for the essence of Gadamer's hermeneutics, and any anti-Enlightenment thrust it has, that is hardly the stuff of political extremism.

The French connection in the sequence Wolin is investigating comes with figures, such as Blanchot and Bataille, who are more literary than philosophical and certainly politically extreme in a way that the later thinkers Wolin takes up are not. These later thinkers, especially Foucault and Derrida, are also more prominent, and the ones now identified with the movement of postmodernism which Wolin is especially concerned to put under a critical spotlight. So we may pass over the transitional thinkers and concentrate on the outcome, wherein also the movement shifts from the right to the left but with disturbing similarities according to Wolin. Alongside Foucault and Derrida, he includes Jean-François Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard, and writes:

> Whereas the left's previous targets had been social inequality and class injustice, the postmodernists, inspired by Nietzsche and Heidegger, adopted a neo-Spenglerian attitude of "total critique". They aimed their sights unremittingly at "reason", "humanism", "modernity " – at the same targets that, for decades, had been privileged objects of scorn and derision among proponents of the counterrevolutionary right (279).

Although, therefore, Wolin's more sweeping pronouncements, and his book's subtitle, suggest that there is a host of theorists in the same camp, it becomes increasingly clear that there are significant differences and shifts among them, and that often what he is drawing attention to are affinities at a certain level, and not as such consistent, common positions. But several things his overall argument brings out remain striking and disturbing, and these can be usefully focused by reference just to Foucault and Derrida.

One obvious fact, emphasized by those philosophers themselves, is the imprint of Nietzsche. In Foucault's case it emerges with two central concepts, power and genealogy. Like Nietzsche, but in dramatically novel ways, Foucault traces the origins of certain dominant and accepted ideas to their source in the systematic, even if at the time unrecognized, attempts by governing powers in society to categorize and control types of persons or segments of the population, including the insane, the sick, and the sexually 'deviant'. Foucault applies this sort of analysis not just or even primarily to the state, to the formal offices of government as a central power, but also to innumerable institutions and forms of social relation which, under the guise of invoking expert knowledge for purely clinical or administrative purposes, are actually constructing coercive notions and identities. For Foucault, society is really a seamless web of such stuff, and philosophical theories, in the name of reason, humanity, and neutral values, are an accomplice in the task. The Nietzschean undertaking of Foucault is always therefore one of unmasking. But to what end, and what does it all add up to politically?

Foucault's own involvements have been various, often erratic, and easy targets for criticism. Michael Walzer, for example, refers to Foucault's stances in 1968 and the aftermath – much subsequent, that is, to Foucault's having joined and then quit the French Communist Party – as "'infantile leftism', that is, less an endorsement than an outrunning of the most radical argument in any political struggle" (Walzer, 1986, p. 51). And Foucault's favorable view of Khomeini's revolution in Iran clearly evinced a failure to oppose the prior rule of the Shah not in the name of another extreme regime but instead on the basis of sensible, centrist liberal-democratic values.[18] Yet, the very issue for Foucault's thinking in matters of politics, as Alan Ryan, among others, has stressed is this: "It is impossible

[18] See Eribon (1991), Chapter 19.

to discover what Foucault supposed liberation involves. Or rather, it is not all that difficult to see what he was against, but harder to see what he was for" (Ryan, 1993, p. 17). The point is that Foucault's Nietzschean theoretical outlook, which treats values and institutions as products of power and manipulation, leaves us with empty notions of resistance (or 'transgression') and personal liberation. All of this is what Wolin, fairly briefly, seeks to bring out: a rejection of reason the endpoint of which is mindless political nihilism (164).

Wolin deals with Derrida at greater length and more substantially.[19] And there is about Derrida a disclaimer, but then also a version of the indictment: "Derrida is by no means a Counter-Enlightenment thinker. Nevertheless, in the lexicon of deconstruction, 'reason' is identified as a fundamental source of tyranny and oppression" (21). At the heart of Derrida's project of 'deconstruction' is a critique of Western philosophy for its 'logocentrism' or attachment to rationally precise concepts and categories aimed at specifying meaning and truth. The trouble, for Derrida, is that these notions constitute arbitrary confinements of the reality they are supposed to depict, and so yield always a contrary residue, a 'trace' of what they are not, or a 'différance' in Derrida's multiply suggestive term. Again, Nietzsche looms. As another commentator sums it up: "...there is a profound methodological affinity between Derrida and Nietzsche in terms of a rejection of the binary logic that they both view as a mainstay of the philosophical tradition" (Schrift, 1995, p. 15). The result, already encountered in others, is that what can be conceptually grasped and communicated about reality is necessarily incomplete and partial. Paradoxically, Derrida is left trying to express that fact.

But, again, what of ethics and more concretely of politics? Little was said, directly, throughout much of Derrida's oeuvre,[20] but in his later works, in the decade of the 1990s, he attempted to give answers (Derrida, 1992, 1994, 1997). Democracy and the rule of law have been at once targets of criticism for him and, in idealized versions, objects of veneration. Actual democracies and systems of law, however respectable in the eyes of others, are in no way to be identified with genuine systems of rights and justice. Endorsement is reserved for a justice that lurks beyond actual positive law and for something called democracy *à venir* (the pun, on *avenir*, being of course intended). Now, there is certainly nothing wrong with holding out ideals which are always yardsticks by which to judge reality. But Derrida is up to something more. The problem for him, ultimately, which connects with his initial challenge to what is graspable and communicable, lies with rules and principles, the sort of normative grounding associated with Kant or the (modern) natural law tradition. Rules and principles, he alleges, are never adequate to the justice of the singular case or the concrete efficacy of rights. One might mistakenly associate that kind of critique with various political theorists and philosophers of law in the liberal-democratic camp, for example Ronald Dworkin according to whom law filters out injustices and gives content to its principles only gradually, over time.[21] But by contrast with Derrida and his abstruse writings and wordplay, Dworkin and such theorists typically elaborate arguments by reference to specific cases and associated principles, and so show how actual democratic systems and legal judgments can reasonably achieve or approximate what is normatively required. For Derrida, increasingly, it all comes

[19] By way of background, there is the interesting (but wearying) "L'affaire Derrida" which played out over many weeks in *The New York Review of Books* (1993). Derrida, Wolin, and others engaged in an exchange over Wolin's (1991) publication in *The Heidegger Controversy* of a version of an interview Derrida had earlier given in France.

[20] See Bennington (2001) and Simon Critchley (1992) pp. XII, 236.

[21] See Dworkin (1986).

down to a kind of non-rational decisionism, and talk even of the 'mystical' grounds of authority. Wolin makes much also of Derrida's speaking of founding acts of revolution as involving a 'purifying violence' (244). The issue, in short, for Wolin, is not merely the distrust of reason in Derrida, but the move away from the liberal foundations and focus that go along with an Enlightened conception of it.

Many people, academics included, are inclined to think that whatever direction or misdirection philosophy follows, the practical political world will proceed along its own path, for better or worse. Wolin's sensible case throughout is that practice can be guided and certainly misguided by theory, and he seeks to turn more concretely to these matters in three chapters. Two are by way of interludes, addressing, respectively, current right-wing tendencies in Germany (with revisionist historians, among others) and in France (under LePen, among others). There is also a concluding chapter on the contempt, past and present, for the very image of America, an attitude that serves Wolin as a barometer of hostility to individual rights and social diversity.

Unfortunately, these portions of the book are less than satisfying in themselves and inadequately tied to the rest. Some reservations are owing to what Wolin acknowledges and even emphasizes. The extent of popular support for extremist movements in Europe is, thankfully, limited, and the powerful forces of fascism in the 1920s and 1930s took hold in very specific conditions (259). Still, and rightfully so, he advocates not complacency but being on the lookout for ideological resources that may inspire or fortify extremist politics. A particular strand of thought in this regard on which Wolin comments in the indicated sections deserves notice both for what Wolin correctly and perhaps incorrectly signals.

The theme in question is culture, as referring to distinctive standpoints and identities. Culture, we saw, is something that the Enlightenment was profoundly wary of, and yet is something that postmodernists and others have turned into a central and positive concern. Wolin's stance here, once more, is unease with the reorientation, and alignment with the Enlightenment. He forcefully says: "Identity is not an argument. It represents an appeal to 'life' or brute existence as opposed to principles that presuppose argumentative give-and-taken" (13). In ways, no doubt, this can be true. The mindless retreat into cultural relativism and associated tribalism is an important sub-theme of Wolin's book and a topic of special and increasing urgency nowadays. But in altered form, the concern with culture and identity is a large and respectable one on the current philosophical scene, via the work of Charles Taylor, Will Kymlicka, and others, though such work is also by no means unchallenged (Taylor et al., 1992; Kymlicka, 1995; Barry, 2001; Appiah, 2005). Wolin, I take it, is open to at least some aspects of this current countenancing of culture, and in any case, it is important to accept that the praise of the Enlightenment and its heritage needs to be nuanced. In its eagerness for reason and universal human rights, there may be much that the Enlightenment missed as to the legitimacy of cultural distinctiveness and particular identities. But even if so, it is vital to insist, with Wolin and against a whole array of cultural theorists, that any accommodation of the neglected concerns must be within the framework of the Enlightenment's fundamentals, and not of some outlook opposite to them.

References

Appiah, K. A. (2005). *The ethics of identity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Aronovitch, H. (1996). Reflective equilibrium or evolving tradition? *Inquiry*, *39*(3–4), 399–419.

Aschheim, S. E. (1992). *The Nietzsche legacy in Germany*, 1890–1990. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Bair, D. (2003). *Jung: A biography*. Boston: Little Brown.
Barry, B. (2001). *Culture and equality*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
Bennington, G. (2001). Derrida and politics. In T. Cohen (Ed.), *Jacques Derrida and the humanities: A critical reader* (pp. 193–212). Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.
Connolly, W. (1991). *Identity/difference: Democratic negotiations of political paradox*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.
Critchley, S. (1992). *The ethics of deconstruction*. Oxford, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell.
Derrida, J. (1992). Forces: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority'. In D. Cornell, M. Rosenfeld, & D. G. Carlson (Eds.), *Deconstruction and the possibility of justice*. London: Routledge (Trans. Mary Quaintance).
Derrida, J. (1994). *Specters of Marx*. New York: Routledge (Trans. Peggy Kamuf).
Derrida, J. (1997). *Politics of friendship*. London; New York: Verso (Trans. George Collins).
Derrida, J., Wolin, R., et al. (1993). L'affaire Derrida. *New York Review of Books, 40* (4), 44–45, February 11; *40* (5), 57, March 4; *40* (6), 65–66, March 25; *40* (8), 68–69, April 22.
Detmer, D. (1997). Gadamer's critique of the enlightenment. In L.E. Hahn (Ed.), *The philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer* (pp. 275–286). Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court.
Dworkin, R. (1986). *Law's empire*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
Eribon, D. (1991). *Michel Foucault*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press (Trans. Betsy Wing).
Ferry, L., & Renaut, A. (1990). *French philosophy of the sixties*. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts (Trans. Mary Cattani).
Ferry, L., & Renaut, A. (Eds.) (1997). *Why we are not Nietzscheans*. Chicago: University of Chicago (Trans. Robert de Loaiza).
Gadamer, H-G. (1997a). Reflections on my philosophical journey. In L. E. Hahn (Ed.), *The philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer* (pp. 3–63). Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court.
Gadamer, H-G. (1997b). Reply to David Detmer. In L. E. Hahn (Ed.), *The philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer* (pp. 287 – 288). Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court.
Grondin, J. (2003). *Hans-Georg Gadamer: A biography*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, pp. 157ff. (Trans. Joel Weinsheimer).
Kaufmann, W. [1950]1974. *Nietzsche: Philosopher, psychologist, antichrist*, 4th ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Kymlicka, W. (1995). *Multicultural citizenship*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Lilla, M. (2001). *The reckless mind: Intellectuals in politics*. New York: New York Review Books.
McDowell, J. (2002). Gadamer and Davidson on understanding and relativism. In J. Malpas, U. Answald, & J. Kertscher (Eds.), *Gadamer's Century: Essays in Honor of Hans-Georg Gadamer* (pp. 173 – 93). Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: MIT.
Nehamas, A. (1985). *Nietzsche: Life as literature*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
Noll, R. (1994). *The Jungian cult: Origins of a charismatic movement*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Odanjyk, W. (1976). *Jung and politics: The political and social ideas of C.G. Jung*. New York: Harper and Row.
Rockmore, T. (1992). *Heidegger's philosophy and Nazism*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Rorty, R. (1988). Taking philosophy seriously. *The New Republic*, *198* (15), 31 – 34, April 11.
Rorty, R. (1990). Another possible world. *London Review of Books*. p. 21. February 8.
Rorty, R. (2004). Philosophical convictions. *The Nation*, pp. 53 – 54. June 14.
Ryan, A. (1993). Foucault's life and hard times. *New York Review of Books*, *40* (7), 12–17. April 8.
Schalow, F. (1989). Heidegger, the polity and national socialism. *Interpretation*, *26* (1), 121–135.
Schrift, A. D. (1995). *Nietzsche's French legacy: A genealogy of poststructuralism*. New York; London: Routledge.
Sternhell, Z. (1986). *Neither right nor left: Fascist ideology in France*. Princeton: Princeton University Press (Trans. David Maisell).
Sternhell, Z., Sznajder, M., & Asheri, M. (1994). *The birth of fascist ideology: From cultural rebellion to political revolution*. Princeton: Princeton University Press (Trans. David Maisel).
Talmon, J. L. (1970). *The origins of totalitarian democracy*. New York: Norton.
Taylor, C. (2002). Understanding the other: A Gadamerian view on conceptual schemes. In J. Malpas, U. von Arnswald, & J. Kertscher (Eds.), *Gadamer's century: Essays in honor of Hans-Georg Gadamer* (pp. 279 – 297). Boston: MIT.
Taylor, C, et al. (1992). *Multiculturalism and the politics of recognition*. In A. Gutmann (Ed.), Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Walzer, M. (1986). The politics of Michel Foucault. In D. C. Hoy (Ed.), *Foucault: A critical reader* (p. 51–68). Oxford; New York: Blackwell.
Wolin, R (Ed.) (1991). *The Heidegger controversy: A critical reader.* New York: Columbia University Press.
Wolin, R. (2003). Socratic Apology: A Wonderful, Horrible Life of Hans-Georg Gadamer. Book Forum. http://www.bookforum.com/wolin.html. (Summer).
Yovel, Y. (1998). *Dark riddle: Hegel, Nietzsche and the Jews*. University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University.