



Review

Reviewed Work(s): *The Trial of Socrates* by I. F. Stone

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Book Reviews: Political Theory

trary to Schneck's occasionally unconvincing generalizing attempts, was restricted to the lower, that is, useful and vital, values inherent in distributing power and generating well-being. Thus the state would remain merely a negative condition, "the *conditio sine qua non* of a factual world of cultural goods." Max Scheler contends that the ethos by which the state fulfills its tasks stems not from the state itself but from the "spiritual collective persons behind it." Scheler's ideal society, I suggest, constitutes a *Nova Civitas Dei*. It is a society that supplants the Augustinian, symbiotic indifference toward the city of man with a finely calibrated unity in whose embrace "aristocracy in heaven does not preclude democracy on earth." Scheler's politics, then, while minimalist, inherits and fleshes out the suprapolitical values latent in Locke's *Second Treatise on Government*, Madison's *Federalist Papers*, J. S. Mill's *On Liberty*, and Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*.

Let me add in conclusion that Stephen Schneck's explicit politicoethical commitment and meticulous scholarship—not withstanding the unanswered questions and shortcomings that usually accompany projects of this magnitude—resonates with Max Scheler's final words, "We must not wait for theoretical certainties before we commit ourselves. It is the commitment of person himself that opens up the possibility of 'knowing'."

MAHMOUD SADRI

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The Trial of Socrates. By I. F. Stone. Boston: Little, Brown, 1988. 282p. \$18.95.

Intending originally to write a historical account of the freedom of thought, I. F. Stone was held fast by the spectacle of Socrates' trial and execution. To find out how this could have happened in a society as free as Athens, Stone renewed his study of Classical Greek and immersed himself in the ancient texts. The result is described as "the Athenian side of the story" (p. xi). Xenophon and, especially, Plato have left us speeches in Socrates' defense; Stone presents "the missing case for the prosecution" (p. 5).

Stone believes that Socrates despised the Athenian democracy. In opposition to the Greek ideal of equal citizens ruling and being ruled in turn, Socrates believed that "virtue is knowledge" and so looked down on the uneducated common man. Because he believed that government was a craft like other crafts, he thought that it should be entrusted to those with the relevant technical qualifications: "He and his disciples saw the human community as a herd that had to be ruled by a king or kings, as sheep by a shepherd" (p. 39). Stone believes that Socrates helped to turn his associates against the Athenian democracy. When Athens was shaken by a series of "political earthquakes" in the closing years of the fifth century, the Athenians turned on Socrates as an enemy of democracy. Even then, Stone believes, Socrates brought his death upon himself. He refused various means of avoiding his fate, including basing his defense upon the Athenian ideal of freedom of speech, which "might easily" (p. 198) have gotten him off. Accordingly, in chapter 16, Stone gives us his own "Apology of Socrates"—what Socrates should have said.

As a work of popular history and entertainment, *The Trial of Socrates* is unflinchingly energetic. It is written in pungent journalistic style and should inspire wide discussion. A large readership should also benefit from the repeated reminder of the gulf that separates Plato's political thought and the ideals of modern liberal democracy. There are some interesting questions for the specialist as well, for instance, the extent to which Athens actually did promote free thought and speech (chaps. 15 and 17 and epilogue), and why Socrates did not resist political evils more vigorously, whether those of the Athenian democracy or, especially, those of the Thirty Tyrants (chap. 8).

Stone is surely to be commended for the great effort that this book represents. But effort alone is not always enough. Because of the widespread disagreements that pervade classical scholarship, he preferred to rely on primary sources (p. x). But his reading of these is skewed by twentieth-century concerns. Stone's idealization of Athens—"the most open city of antiquity, and perhaps of all time" (p. 81)—is largely a caricature, based heavily on Pericles' funeral speech in Thucydides' *History*. Stone has explored the scholarly literature on free-

dom of speech and related issues, but a perusal of even the standard sources on other aspects of Athenian politics—works by Finley, Ehrenberg, Jones, and so on—would have led to a more rounded picture.

More serious is Stone's refusal to take Socrates seriously as a philosopher. Socrates' philosophic mission was based on an ideal of human perfection: the need to pursue wisdom and to "care for one's soul" (*Apology* 29d–30b, 36c). But of the nature of Socrates' moral ideas Stone's readers receive hardly a clue. Stone has made little effort to present the Socratic doctrine of the soul. The so-called Socratic paradoxes, that "virtue is knowledge" and "all wrongdoing is caused by ignorance" are brushed aside when they are discussed at all (pp. 66–67, 87–89). Socrates' analogy between virtue and crafts—and so the *basis* for his criticism of democracy—is hardly discussed. There is an enormous, rich literature on Socrates and his philosophy that Stone has barely touched.

According to Plato, Socrates embodied the irony that pervaded his speech. Outwardly he was unkempt and squat, with a snub nose, and walked like a marsh goose. But beneath this appearance dwelled the "images of gods" (*Symposium* 215b). Socrates spent his life chaffing and making fun of his fellowmen (216e); his talk was of "pack-asses, smiths, cobblers, and tanners" (221e). But of course Plato believed that he was "the best and wisest and most righteous man" of his time (*Phaedo* 118a).

Stone's Socrates is less complex. He is a clown and a nuisance. His philosophizing is "stratospheric nonsense" (p. 72), "a metaphysical wild goose chase" (p. 75). His argumentation is contentless destructive dialectic, a bag of sophistic tricks (chap 5). The ideas of the *Gorgias* are "poisonous nonsense" (p. 92). In short, "An unmistakable social snobbery lurked behind Socrates' scornful dismissal of Athenian democracy" (p. 117).

It is perhaps to be expected that Socrates will always be viewed quite differently by different people. There is undoubtedly an element of truth in the portrait that Stone presents. But it would take far more than "the golden haze of the Platonic dialogues" (p. 136) to explain how Stone's Socrates came to play a pivotal role in the history of Western philosophy.

GEORGE KLOSKO

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The Recent Work of Jürgen Habermas: Reason, Justice, and Modernity. By Stephen K. White. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988. 190p. \$29.95.

As one of the foremost theorists of our time, Jürgen Habermas has given rise to a great many commentaries. Stephen White's is one of the better ones. Its value lies not only in his reconstruction of some of Habermas' more complex ideas, but also in White's efforts to defend them.

White's greatest service is in communicating to the reader the concepts and arguments of Habermas' most recent and still largely untranslated works. Some of the more important concepts discussed include the "communicative" versions of action, competence, rationality, ethics, and sociation. In each case White contrasts them with older or more widely held conceptions. In the clash their respective strengths and weaknesses are revealed.

Exposition of these and other concepts is warranted, however, for reasons other than their originality. These concepts also serve as the foundation for Habermas' theory and qualified defense of modernity.

According to White, Habermas' approach to the problem of modernity is best characterized by its goal of developing "standards which allow modernity to interpret itself in a way which is self-critical, but which gives some basis for *normative self-assurance*" (p. 91, my emphasis).

Such a task requires at least two others. One is "completion" of Weber's concept of rationalization. Rationalization, Habermas argues, must be multidimensional, capable of revealing not only the costs of modernity (loss of meaning, disenchantment) but its benefits too. For Habermas, these benefits amount to enhanced (but, as it turns out, still inhibited) "learning capacities" for mankind. One may very well wonder, however, whether this is indeed a completion of Weber's project. As White correctly points out, "Specialists will find much to contest" (p. 93).

The second task is construction of an altogether different and more accurate theory for illuminating and explaining the "pathologies" of a rationalist society" (p. 91). The distinction between base and superstructure will no longer suffice, nor will the approaches commonly associated with strict functionalism or systems