

The psychology of happiness is a complex field. There is a plethora of theories, research measures and definitions. But for those who have yet to encounter the significant developments that the field of psychology has to offer this is an excellent overview.

Reviewed by Richard Tooth

***The Reckless Mind:
Intellectuals in Politics***

Mark Lilla

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IN HIS book, *Capturing the Culture*, American film critic Richard Grenier made the comment that the West's cultural and intellectual elites 'find this society morally wretched, in fact, miserably lacking in the shining values that give life meaning'. This statement is borne out in Mark Lilla's book, *The Reckless Mind*, which studies the lives of some of the 20th century's most prominent intellectuals and thinkers, and their adherence to totalitarian doctrines and attitudes.

Consisting of essays, which originally appeared in the *New York Review of Books* and *The Times Literary Supplement*, Lilla's book studies the lives of eight prominent thinkers. The chapters deal with Carl Schmitt, Walter Benjamin, Alexander Kojeve, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. A long opening chapter looks at the intellectual love affair between Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers and Hannah Arendt. The concluding chapter, 'The Lure of Syracuse', analyses the nature of what Lilla calls the philotyrannical mind in the 20th century.

The chapter on Heidegger, Jaspers and Arendt beautifully evokes the intellectual friendship that can develop when people share a love of philosophy. This relationship broke down, however, when Heidegger attached himself closely to the Nazi Party in the early 1930s, joining the party openly in 1933 when Hitler became Chancellor. Jaspers, in particular, tried to convince his

old friend and former colleague that his commitment was a mistake. Heidegger for his part distanced himself from Jaspers, whose wife was Jewish, during his rectorship at Freiburg University. Arendt fled to France, and then onto the US. Even after the Nazi defeat and the revelations about the death camps, Heidegger refused to apologise for his part in the regime, forcing Jaspers and Arendt to conclude that despite his philosophical brilliance, Heidegger was morally a lost cause.

The chapters on Carl Schmitt and Alexander Kojeve are of particular interest. Neither thinker is well-known in the Anglo-Saxon world, though their influence on European thought was and is profound. Schmitt came from a bourgeois Catholic background and rose to become one of the chief legal experts of the Third Reich, defending the concept of the Führerprinzip as a necessary measure in the so-called war against the Jews.

Schmitt's continued intellectual influence on the German Right is extraordinary given his Nazi record. What is even more extraordinary is the interest of the radical New Left in Germany who seem to have adopted him as an important thinker, drawn to his scathing attacks on liberalism and democracy.

Unknown outside France, Alexander Kojeve was the son of middle-class Russian parents who fled Russia in the wake of the October Revolution in 1917, despite his own conversion to communism. Attracted to radical political and mystical doctrines, and an ardent admirer of Stalin, Kojeve expounded a strange philosophy that combined Hegel, Marx, Heidegger and Nietzsche to a small audience of left-wing intellectuals in Paris in the 1930s.

Announcing the End of History, Kojeve preached the death of nobility and human greatness, and saw as inevitable the triumph of the universal and homogenous state, which he identified with the liberal capitalist West. His teachings influenced a whole generation of French thinkers, and contributed greatly to the rise of existentialism and postmodernism in the postwar world.

Perhaps the most fascinating chapter is the final one, in which Lilla seeks to rescue the idea of the intellectual from the moral relativism and totalitarianism that many of

the intellectuals in the 20th century have worshipped. Drawing on Plato's idea of the philosopher as a man in love with abstract ideas of Beauty and Goodness, Lilla argues that intellectuals need self-discipline if they are not to let this love become an all-consuming obsession with forcing the world to conform to abstract concepts.

Lilla has hit upon an important point: most of the intellectuals discussed in these essays were caught up in essentially theological and mystical questions. Despairing of a fallen, materialistic world, full of evil and suffering, and lacking in spiritual beliefs and values, many turned to radical political doctrines and parties as a way of correcting the imperfections of the world. Many concluded that these imperfections could only be eradicated via the cleansing fire of totalitarian dictatorship, which would force the human race into conformity with their version of the ideal world.

As Orwell made clear in his classic novel *1984*, totalitarianism was a new religion for many, who hoped it would usher in the Millennium of peace and plenty for the human race. By replacing the union of humanity with God at the end of time, totalitarian doctrines sought to build the perfect society in the present, rescuing a fallen humanity through radical measures and state-sanctioned programmes.

Following Plato, Lilla argues that intellectuals need to restrain their love for abstract virtues, and realise that the Good will never be implemented in an imperfect world. The Philosopher King must learn to rule over his own inner world before he can hope to have any influence on the outside world. And what must the intellectuals do when a society refuses to accept the philosopher's account of the True and the Beautiful? According to Lilla, Plato counsels withdrawal, maintaining a critical distance and awaiting more hopeful times.

Along with Paul Johnson's *Intellectuals* and Tony Judt's *The Burden of Responsibility*, Lilla's book is a worthy contribution to the philosophical history of the 20th century and of Western intellectuals.

Reviewed by Martin Sheehan