



Philosophy in a Time of Lost Spirit: Essays on Contemporary Theory

Ron Beiner

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In the last two centuries, our world would have been a safer place if philosophers such as Rousseau, Marx, and Nietzsche had not given intellectual encouragement to the radical ideologies of Jacobins, Stalinists, and fascists. Maybe the world would have been better off, from the standpoint of sound practice, if philosophers had engaged in only modest, decent theory, as did John Stuart Mill. Yet, as Ronald Beiner contends, the point of theory is not to think safe thoughts; the point is to open intellectual horizons.

In *Philosophy in a Time of Lost Spirit*, Beiner reflects on the dualism of theory and practice. The purpose of the theorist is not to offer sensible guidance on the conduct of social life but to test the boundaries of our vision of social order. Whereas the liberal citizen should embody the practical virtues of prudence and moderation, the theorist should be radical, probing, and immoderate. Looking back at the liberal-communitarian debate of the 1980s, Beiner recognizes that the antidote to our spiritless times lies neither in the embrace of community over individualism nor of individualism over community: both individual and community need to be submitted to radical questioning. It is by exposing ourselves to the challenge of fearless thinking encountered at the philosophical extremities that we are most likely to understand our own world at a deeper level.

In this collection of essays and reviews, Ronald Beiner helps us to think critically about the thought-worlds of our foremost contemporary thinkers, including Hannah Arendt, Allan Bloom, Michel Foucault, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Jürgen Habermas, Will Kymlicka, Christopher Lasch, Richard Rorty, Judith Shklar, Leo Strauss, Charles Taylor, and Michael Walzer.

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