

How and Why Do We Study Philosophy – The Legacy of Heinrich Blücher

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Alexander R. Bazelow

Heinrich Blücher Remembered (Based upon the address delivered at the conference)

Für Lotte Kohler - in grosser Verehrung

To see the divine matters, the stars that,
foiled by some events and fouled by others –
wars and trials and deaths – serenely shine ...
For him, Athens was travel enough
Theodore Weiss¹

In marriage, it is not always easy to tell the partners thoughts apart
Hannah Arendt²

Author's Note: In December of 1970, Hannah Arendt asked me to assist her in the preparation of her late husband Heinrich Blücher's audio tape lectures for eventual publication. I worked on this project for a period of five years until her death. My work consisted of transcription, footnoting, and partial editing. In addition to having access to Heinrich Blücher's study and both libraries, I was also given access to Hannah Arendt's office at the New School for Social Research and the use of her administrative secretary Mr. Robert Bland. It was Hannah Arendt's intention to take the partially edited transcripts and, after completing prior commitments, produce a final published version.

The earliest tapes are from a lecture course entitled Fundamentals of a Philosophy of Art: On the Understanding of Artistic Experience given at the New School for Social Research during the 1951 spring semester. The last tapes are from the 1967 Common Course and 1968 Senior Symposium lectures at Bard. These tape recordings, over one hundred in all, cover the entirety of Blücher's seventeen-year teaching career in America. No names are attached to these tapes to provide any clue as to who made them.³

1 Quoted from "Two for Heinrich Blücher", in *From Princeton One Autumn Afternoon: Collected Poems of Theodore Weiss, 1950 – 1986* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), pp. 157, 158.

2 Hannah Arendt, "Rosa Luxemburg: 1871 - 1919", in H.A., *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt Brace & World, 1968), p. 46.

3 The Kohler/Saner and Kohler editions of the Arendt/Jaspers and Arendt/Blücher correspondence shed some light on this matter. Ruth Shulz who together with her husband Julius were students of Blücher probably made the earliest tapes. There is evidence through correspondence she also transcribed at least *The Quest for God* (New School for Social Research, Fall 1951/Spring 1952) and *Why and How Do We Study Philosophy* (New School for Social Research, Summer 1952). Although there is some indication Blücher was involved in this process, there is no indication he or anyone else ever edited the manuscripts. I found them in his study

Indeed, this activity of students who were unknown to one another, silently preserving a teacher's legacy over such a long period of time is, as far as I know, unprecedented in philosophy. Often it seemed to others that this monumental effort represented a love of students for their teacher that went beyond all reason. Since philosophy, we are told, above all else, should concern itself with reason, the following reflections are an attempt to understand some of the aspects of that love.

On December 1968, Heinrich Blücher stood before a classroom of students for the last time. His choice of lecture topic, which survives in my notes, was not what anyone expected. It had been known for some time that he was ill and would not be returning. Indeed, already the Common Course of the prior year had been somewhat scaled back and in the fall of 1968, it was decided to offer the Senior Symposium as his final course. Everyone present on that day in December assumed that this last lecture would be some kind of grand summing up; a distillation of a philosophical life lived no so much with philosophy as in philosophy. Instead, as Elisabeth Young-Bruehl has suggested,⁴ this last lecture dealt with a very simple subject: The responsibility that the young and old have to one another.

The choice of this subject was not an accident. Political protests had been building for some time and the situation on college and university campuses, tense for many years, turned in a number of places to outright violence. I had arrived at Bard College that fall, a veteran and transfer student. My decision to come here was actually the result of a single event. Several months earlier I had organized a debate on the Vietnam War.⁵ On the panel that evening was two students from Bard. What strikes me now, as I recall that event over thirty years ago, watching those young Bard students, was their complete and utter lack of fear. This was a place I wanted to be and people whom I wanted to be among. A German language professor I knew, who had graduated from Bard, told me about Blücher, and her glowing testimony together with the conclusions I drew from the debate confirmed my choice.

When I arrived on campus, many of the refugee scholars were astounded at what was going on around them. They had not seen political protests like this since their youth and were frightened of where it would lead. Blücher, who while living in Europe had been a

among his papers in red loose-leaf binders where they had resided for over eighteen years. At the time of Hannah Arendt's death the plan was to finish the material currently under transcription/editing and then go back to these earlier manuscripts, correct all typographical or clerical errors, footnote them, and bring them into conformity with the other material. See letter 137 (dated November 1, 1952) in Hannah Arendt and Karl Jaspers, *Correspondence 1926-1969*, edited by Lotte Kohler and Hans Saner, translated from the German by Robert and Rita Kimber (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), p 203; and letters dated 5.17.52; 8.11.52; March 30, 55; and 7.6.58 in *Within Four Walls, The Correspondence between Hannah Arendt and Heinrich Blücher 1936-1968*, edited with an introduction by Lotte Kohler (New York: Harcourt, Inc. 1996), pp. 172; 216-217; and 243; 333.

4 Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt – For Love of the World* (Yale University Press, 1982), p.433.

5 G. Gordon Liddy, then Assistant District Attorney for Dutchess County, later one of the Watergate burglars, was on the panel. He was attempting to take the Republican nomination for Congress away from Hamilton Fish Jr, and was eager for a forum to expound his views. The debate occurred at Ulster County Community College, Stone Ridge, New York. That ill fated race brought him to the attention of Richard Nixon's election committee and the rest is history. Those events are described in *Will: The Autobiography of G. Gordon Liddy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980), pp. 121 –124.

member of the German Communist Party,⁶ viewed this entire matter differently. He had seen real revolution close up. Notwithstanding the issue of the Vietnam War, he didn't believe the growing clashes between students and police were going to end in the kind of revolutionary upheaval that rocked Germany during 1918/1919 and later in 1923.⁷ Without a disintegrating body politic, some degree of factional unity, and the means for seizing power no revolutionary movement can succeed. Although it is true that within all of the various anti-war and civil-rights organizations there was a core group of radicals, by and large most participants were law abiding.⁸ It did not take long to see that the protestors had neither a plan for seizing political power nor any notion as to what to do if for

6 We do not have a lot of information about Blücher's years as a Communist; nevertheless what we do have confirms one thing. As Jack Blum, a former student of Blücher pointed out in his remarks at the conference *How and Why Do We Study Philosophy -- The Legacy of Heinrich Blücher*, by the late twenties and early thirties his Marxism such as it was reflected an ethical not ideological commitment. His decision to follow his mentor Heinrich Brandler, in the late twenties, when the latter formed an alternative KPO (Kommunistische Partei-*Opposition*) to the by then Moscow dominated KPD (Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands) is the most striking example. Another was his characterization of Marx as an important social thinker and defender of a worker's right to economic and political freedom, even as he disowned the ideologue and theorist of dialectical materialism. Blücher was probably a Communist, because the alternative was either the status quo or some form of fascism, which was even more unthinkable. Heinrich Blücher was never a cynical or despairing thinker. His intellectual commitments, like his governing passions, were always directly stated. Even in exile in Paris his letters make it clear he believed it was the Hegelianism at the core of Marxism that was the problem. He felt it seduced men into creating ideologies that could not possibly be true and then led them to compound their mistakes by organizing societies based upon those ideologies that produced nothing but disaster. In a letter to Arendt dated Paris, 11.25.36, he says, comparing the communism of Europe in the age of fascism to that of his youth, "then at least, we brought new husks of concepts back with us. But since the young now content themselves with being armored with just the term dialectics, they conquer only empty clichés with their cardboard swords. The likes of us search for the dialectics within things and are denounced as intellectuals, while the scholastic cardboard-sword heroes extol themselves as hands-on politicians. It is as if everything were twisted around and around in these times of chronic bankruptcies, and one has no inkling of all the things one can end up becoming in the eyes of another." Arendt/Blücher, *Within Four Walls* (op. cit.), pp. xvi, 23, 24, and 27. However despite such views, reading his letters and notebook entries from this period leads one to the inescapable conclusion that he still believed Marx's ethical vision could be salvaged. Even after abandoning such notions in America, Heinrich Blücher as well as Hannah Arendt had nothing but contempt for the former Communists turned reactionaries who condoned or contributed to the persecution of others for beliefs those same reactionaries had held only a few years earlier (see letter 142 from Arendt to Karl Jaspers, Arendt/Jaspers, *Correspondence 1926-1969* [op. cit.], pp. 209-217, as an example; there are many others). Nothing shows the man more clearly than his condemnation, audible on the tape recordings from 1952, of the witch hunts raging around him at a time when he still may have lacked citizenship (he received it on August 7, 1952); condemnations that given his circumstances took great courage (for example the explicit condemnation of Senator Joseph McCarthy in *How and Why Do We Study Philosophy*, Lecture 10, pp. 68).

7 The best that can be said for the student uprisings of the sixties is that they were a revolutionary situation that fell far short of a revolution. Compared to what happened in Germany after World War I, the differences are stark. For one, the Spartacists were able to conspire with mutinous elements of the German military to actually win some battles. For another, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht succeeded in merging all of the smaller left-wing groups into one organization; the KPD. Lastly Germany had just lost a major war and was in a state of internal disintegration. Ironically that disintegration, unlike in Russia, only hardened the military leaderships support of the government. Since there were not enough mutinous elements in the army to change the balance of power, the general level of deprivation throughout the country only exposed weaknesses in the revolutionary's organizational structure. The situation in the United States could not have been more different. Despite morale problems in Vietnam and intense draft protests, no significant faction of the uniformed military ever joined the protestors. Secondly, no leadership faction among the various anti-war groups ever managed to reconcile their diverse aims so that they often found themselves working at cross purposes. It is true that anti war groups in Europe were larger and had more success; but even in France chaos took over the moment a demonstration ended and the next phase of political action had to begin. In the United States the worst demonstrations never succeeded in more than disrupting daily life, taking over a university building here and there, or instigating riots that the police quickly brought under control. While it is

some reason political power simply fell into their hands. Instead, as Heinrich Blücher went from supporter of the students to severe critic,⁹ he felt that the war was simply a convenient catalyst¹⁰ for issues of university governance that had been building for some time. On many occasions during his teaching career, he had been asked to mediate student/faculty and student/administration conflicts,¹¹ and he noticed subtle differences in succeeding generations of students as they became more skeptical of authority and more assertive. He felt that this was as much a cultural as a political phenomenon. I recall him telling me, after the students at Bard threatened to go on strike that the only solution to this kind of problem was for the students, faculty, and administration to sit down and decide how they wanted to be governed. In fact, that is precisely what happened after students did strike, and as I went through old issues of various college publications in preparation for this talk, I was stuck by the foresight and good will of all parties in defusing and creatively dealing with a situation that elsewhere left decades of bitterness.¹²

true in France that huge demonstrations rocked the French Republic, no transfer of political power ever occurred between a legitimate European government and the protestors. In the United States the demonstrators did convince Lyndon Johnson, unlike DeGaulle, to bow out before the 1968 presidential election but that is a far cry from actually being in a position to seize the instruments of governance.

- 8 There were exceptions such as the offshoot underground groups in America, or the various Red Army Factions in Europe, but everyone knew these were terrorist organizations, not political ones.
- 9 Blücher's criticism of the philosophical left, both old and new, should not be confused with the crude anti-Communism of the late forties and early fifties, or the attacks on liberalism heard so frequently then and now. It is certain that if Arendt and Blücher were alive today, they would subject the kinds of politics now practiced in America to the same intense scrutiny that they subjected the cardinal issues of their own day. In all matters pertaining to politics, from the communism/capitalism debate to the issues of civil rights, war, and the Middle East, Arendt and Blücher always followed the same procedure; crudely put, *not to deny the symptoms of a problem* but instead to subject *the diagnosis* and especially the *treatment or supposed cure* to the most intense analysis and debate. They had no use for bad solutions to legitimate problems, and Heinrich Blücher's views on Marxism, the Vietnam War, student protests, and the like were all of a piece with that. In the beginning Arendt and Blücher had great sympathy for the students, both in their aims and means. They supported the elimination of military related university research. They also supported free and open debate untainted by surreptitious grants and money as had been evidenced by a number of scandals involving the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). They eventually followed Mary McCarthy and turned against the Vietnam War; donating money to anti-war groups, signing petitions, and supporting anti-war candidates. But when students lobbied for the elimination of all traditional classes and grades, when war protestors began using violence as an instrument, and when disorder in the cities turned into outright crime and looting; they parted company with the movement. The letters Hannah Arendt wrote to Mary McCarthy during late 1969 and 1970-71 show a clear disillusion and weariness as if both, she and Blücher (and later she alone) had seen it all before. See Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt (op. cit.)*, pp. 412-430; and *Between Friends: The Correspondence of Hannah Arendt and Mary McCarthy*, edited with an introduction by Carol Brightman (New York: Harcourt Brace & Comp.), pp. 247-303.
- 10 Even Hannah Arendt expressed this view, as many of the largest protests started out as demonstrations against university rules and regulations: "The crisis of the university is very real regardless of the student riots *which only brought it out into the open.*" See letter from Hannah Arendt to Mary McCarthy dated New York, December 21, 1968 in Arendt/McCarthy, *Between Friends (op. cit.)*, p. 231 (my italics).
- 11 For example, in March of 1955 he mediated a conflict over the ejection of a male student who had been caught living in a female student's dormitory. A month later another conflict erupted over the length of student criteria sheets. See the letters dated 3.20.55 and 4.24.55 in Arendt/Blücher, *Within Four Walls (op. cit.)*, pp. 239, 240, and 250.
- 12 On December 1969, a year after Heinrich Blücher's last lecture, the students unanimously voted to go on strike. The College President and Board of Trustees realized that maintenance of the *status quo* was no longer possible. With the approval of the Board of Trustees, a committee was formed consisting of three students, three faculty members, the Dean of the College, and a member of the Board of Trustees, to rewrite the College's laws of governance. For the first time in history, students were given a voice in the matters of education that were most important to them. All non-appointed members of the committee were chosen by an election of their peers. I was one of them. After the document was completed, students and faculty then voted

Blücher's quotation from Kafka: "every revolution evaporates and leaves behind the slime of a new bureaucracy," and his other observations: "there is a reason for respecting those who have brought you into the world regardless of what you might think of the world" and "there are no monsters, except those set into the world by men;"¹³ were warnings sent across generations, to young people impatient for change, that the world was far more complex than they had previously imagined. It was not their elders who were necessarily their enemies. Rather their real enemies, if they wanted to find them, were elsewhere.

Fiercely independent, combative, and in awe of no one, Blücher had evolved his own philosophical approach quite apart from the then prevailing intellectual climate. In so doing he perfected the technique of involving his students as collaborators and peers. This is stated clearly in the first sentences from the introductory lecture on the Common Course:

The task before you will not be accomplished here and cannot be taught. If you want to become free men and women, this task will remain yours for your whole life; we your teachers, will start you on this task, show it to you as more experienced collaborators, join and help you through it because we ourselves are still in it. The task is "to major" in life. No final degree will be bestowed upon us, though we may accumulate little degrees during our life which will consist of recognition and confirmation given freely by other human beings who are engaged in the same task. The final degree can be conferred upon us only at the moment of our death, tentatively by our survivors and perhaps finally by God.¹⁴

This call to a collaborative project of philosophical transformation was quite extraordinary.¹⁵ Unlike Sartre, Camus or the other existentialists, Blücher did not believe that we are alone in the world. He did not believe that through what are essentially heroic or inward acts, we can create meaning out of this aloneness. He did not believe, in the words of the poet Paul Celan, that "there are still songs to be sung, on the other side of mankind."¹⁶ Throughout his various critiques of Kierkegaard, Camus, Sartre, and Heidegger Blücher was adamant on one point: "If we are so lost in the world that we cannot do anything meaningful towards any other human being, it follows then that we cannot do anything meaningful inwardly either. Once my communication with others is broken I become absolutely meaningless within myself, and there is no way out of that conclusion."¹⁷

to accept it or reject it in separate referendums. Over thirty years later that document still forms the core of the College's laws of governance. Hannah Arendt's and Heinrich Blücher's philosophy of political action, rooted as it is in workers councils, American Federalism as practiced by its founders, and local activism is often criticized as impractical. Perhaps we need more such impractical political activism.

13 Heinrich Blücher Archive, *Last Lecture*, Section IV. The tone of *reconciliation* in this last lecture is very moving. By late 1968 Blücher saw the crises of the sixties as a crisis of *meaning*, not just a crisis of politics. Observations like "I may not know the meaning of life... [yet] through you I have tried to become more meaningful than I ever was", and "if you stop at some point in your life asking unanswerable questions then you find that [soon] you are no longer able to ask answerable ones," and so on, show the philosopher trying to connect with the young at a most basic personal level.

14 Heinrich Blücher Archive, "Introduction" to the *Common Course*, Lecture 1, pp. 1.

15 Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt (op.cit.)*, pp. 269-271.

16 Paul Celan, *ATEMWENDE (BREATHTURN)*, 1967. The translation roughly follows John Felstiner, *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan* (New York-London: W.W. Norton, 2001), pp. 240, 241; but several lines have been retranslated. FADENSONNEN: Über der grauschwarzen Ödnis. / Ein baum- / hoher Gedanke/ greift sich den Lichtton: es sind / noch Lieder zu singen jenseits / der Menschen. (THREADSUNS. Over the grayblack waste. / A tree- / high thought / strikes the light tone: there are / still songs to be sung on the other side / of mankind.)

17 Heinrich Blücher Archive, *How and Why Do We Study Philosophy*, Lecture 3, p. 16.

Blücher stripped these doctrines of all the romantic associations so common in the popular literature of that time. He felt that men who could not establish meaningful human connections were flawed, not heroic and that much of what the existentialists praised masked a horrific egoism. Existentialist freedom, he once emphatically observed, “might be of use to an individual, but it is of no use to the next fellow and [of] no use to the world.”¹⁸ Absolutely nothing changed if one replaced any of the various forms of commitment with other forms of contemplation; the result was the same, a doctrine that was symptomatic of the malaise it was trying to comprehend.

Similarly, he had deep reservations about what was called, for lack of a better term, the philosophical left. He also had equally deep reservations about all “isms” and “status quos” as well as the direction Anglo-American philosophy had taken after the war. In a philosophical notebook from the 1930’s and 40’s, which is both handwritten and typed, one can see him struggling with some of the questions that later germinated into important insights.¹⁹ The failure of the German revolution and subsequent murder of many of its participants taught Blücher a bitter lesson, one that always floated just below the surface of his thought: When it comes to consolidating political power, all politicians act alike, and the degree of barbarity of the regime has nothing to do with the rhetoric flowing from its leaders and everything to do with whether or not those leaders and their followers recognize any constraints on their freedom of action.²⁰ He understood that those constraints, when they exist, don’t just drop out of heaven. Because of what he had learned from Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, he saw the Achilles heel of both the old and the new left; the first, built on a flawed theory, and the second, without a plan to take power even as it continually confused violence and power.²¹ If he thought that bad philosophy had produced much of this, and that therefore a good or at least better philosophy could produce something better and if this led him into an exploration of art, myth, and ultimately the nine paradigmatic figures, then it also led Hannah Arendt into an exploration of violence, revolution, the American Constitution, and why, despite all of the

¹⁸ *Ibid*, Lecture 13, pp. 93, 94.

¹⁹ This notebook is on view at the Stevenson Library at Bard College. The notebook has no obvious dates, but there are two artifacts that enable us to date it. The handwritten portion has the address 317 West 95th Street New York clearly inscribed on the cover below Blücher’s name. The notebook also is of French manufacture, a typical French university notebook of the 1930s period. In May of 1941 when the Blüchers arrived in America, they rented an apartment at 317 West 95th Street. That apartment had an adjacent apartment. When Hannah Arendt’s mother came in July, the Blüchers rearranged their living situation so that they occupied one of the apartments and her mother the other. The French *imprimatur* means the notebook was probably purchased in Paris during the period of exile in the thirties; the only time Heinrich Blücher ever lived in France. This was a period when he was rethinking much of Marxist doctrine. See Arendt/Blücher, *Within Four Walls* (*op. cit.*), p. 58.

²⁰ “If the young here have an inkling about Rosa Luxemburg, then it will do them good to be confronted by this first attempt to *show what practical methods all obsolete powers use to exert political control over free people through fear.*” See letter of Heinrich Blücher to Hannah Arendt, New York, 7.14.58, *Within Four Walls* (*op. cit.*), p. 335 (my italics).

²¹ Blücher had many sobering criticisms of the new left. Recall the tendency to speak in “manifestos”, e.g., The Port Huron Statement, the list of “non-negotiable demands” that came out of the April 1968 strike at Columbia University, The Black Panther Party Charter, and so on. According to Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, Hannah Arendt also noticed this tendency to speak in manifestos and was always “... trying, without much success, to point out the dangerous confusion of ‘power’ and ‘violence’ in these [documents].” Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt* (*op. cit.*), p. 413. He also understood the new lefts unrelenting attacks on liberalism and their espousal of ideological politics were a dead end in a country with a history of contempt for intellectuals and where social programs could only be funded by taxing citizens whose prospects for social advancement were poor.

calamities visited upon this republic, the worst historical catastrophes have not, and should not happen here.

Much has been written about the esteem in which Hannah Arendt held Blücher's mode of philosophizing and trust me, it's all true. That esteem was multi-dimensional.²² It began with the way he approached his lectures. He would walk slowly into the classroom, sit behind a long table, light up a cigarette or cigarillo, and begin speaking. His voice would rise or fall, depending upon the dramatic effect he wanted to attain. I never saw him stand at a lectern.²³ His speech would flow in a way that never seemed to lose track of whatever thought he was trying to convey, and although there were instances when it might not be clear exactly where he was going, these would be punctuated by insights that seemed to literally come out of nowhere. I remember the time I discovered the "Fragment on Kierkegaard"²⁴ in the lecture course *Man Alone; Existential Thinking from Kierkegaard and Nietzsche to Heidegger and Sartre*. In that fragment Blücher drew the connection between certain modes of introspection practiced by Kierkegaard, and the forms of psychological terror that made innocent men confess to crimes they never committed. I remember bringing the fragment to Hannah Arendt's attention and asking her how he came up with these ideas; how he discovered these kinds of connections, because I had read Kierkegaard many times and many studies as well and I recalled no one ever drawing that explicit insight. She laughed, as if observing a light bulb being turned on in my head that she herself experienced ages ago. I recall making the observation that Augustine and Luther had practiced a similar kind of introspection but she responded that nihilism could never come out of Augustine and Luther, but it could come out of Kierkegaard. Augustine and Luther, she pointed out, were not alone because they actually believed in God, but could someone like Kierkegaard? Because what was fatal in all of this was not the process of introspection; rather it was the "introspection combined with the prior conviction that whatever the answer; whatever the outcome of this process, you were still

22 Cf. Lotte Kohler in her introduction to Arendt/Blücher, *Within Four Walls (op. cit.)*, p. xx: "It should be quite clear by this point that we have long since entered the realm of reciprocal thought between Arendt and Blücher. As 'philosopher citizens' they carried on throughout their lives a personal dialogue. In political matters he was first her teacher and later her adviser and he acted as her critical, philosophical, 'poltergeist.'"

23 Early in his career he apparently did use a lectern. Hannah Arendt, who attended Blücher's lectures in the early 1950s, describes them as follows (in a letter to Kurt Blumenfeld, April 1, 1951): "Every word is in his head, with a concentration that grabs the whole class," and Lotte Kohler writes: "He taught philosophy through philosophizing, without notes" (both quotes in *ibid.*, p. xiv). Compare this to the description by a Heidegger biographer of testimony from one of Heidegger's students in the early 1920s: "Heidegger spoke in a medium-loud voice, *without notes*, and into his speech flowed an exceptional intellect, but even much more so force of will that determined the direction his speech would take, especially when the subject became dangerous." Quoted in Rüdiger Safranski, *Martin Heidegger, Between Good and Evil*, translated from the German by Ewald Osers (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 132 (my italics).

24 Heinrich Blücher Archive, "Fragment on Kierkegaard". What follows is an abridged and slightly altered version of the full fragment." Kierkegaard was the discoverer of the possibility of modern analytic psychology. He lived a neurotic life (which is not the same as saying he was a neurotic) that he created voluntarily [in order to discover certain unknown things]... He was the first [person] to be concerned with the question 'What are human motives like' and to face the possibility [they are all] bad. The interrogator in *Crime and Punishment* was really invented by Kierkegaard (although Dostoyevsky did not know of him); because Kierkegaard had turned himself into an inquisitor, questioning himself (as if he were a criminal) to death. In this process of constant self-reflection he came to the action of the psychological provocateur where he tried to put people before certain artificially created situations where they would be forced to make a decision and then watched the reaction. These situations were created by deliberately false gossip. He was the first modern man to apply scientific terror."

doomed."²⁵ It was the synergy between the two. She made an identical observation within a different context, in the last chapter to later editions of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (entitled "Ideology and Terror: A Novel Form of Government") when she discussed the role of isolation and loneliness in preparing men for totalitarian rule. These insights and many more were an outgrowth of Blücher's critique of nihilism that came, I'm sure, from their own philosophical dialogue.

Last summer, when I returned to Bard for the first time in over a quarter century, Dean Katz took me to the Arendt/Blücher collection here at the Stevenson Library. I last saw these volumes nearly thirty years ago in the Blücher's apartment on Riverside Drive. As we walked up and down the rows of stacks, many memories came back to me. As a young man I had spent much time among these volumes. There was the story Hannah Arendt loved to tell of her visit to Hermann Broch's New Haven apartment after his death only to find various inhabitants fighting over who had the rights to the ownership of his belongings. Broch and Blücher apparently developed the ritual of giving away their worn out billfolds as gifts, Broch to Blücher and Blücher to someone else. One of his billfolds is still in my possession when someone else gave it to me as a memento after Blücher's death; it sits there among my possessions with the wonderful engraving once typical, I gather, of wallet making. There is the gift of the photograph of Blücher from Hannah Arendt, the one I found among a stack of other photographs in his study and which is on the face of the card announcing this conference. There were the stories from their exile in Paris, stories about fear and boredom.²⁶ She combated the boredom by playing chess.²⁷ There were the stories about the difficulty of making decisions under circumstances where you did not know whom you could trust, because unlike in the classroom, in real life no one ever bothers to tell you that for the most important decisions in life there is not a lot of time available for reflection. Sometimes, all that you have is the space of a single breath, to choose an action that may determine if you will live or if you will die. Through these stories it became clearer to me why the faculty of judgment was so important to them; why judgment, like those other miraculous capabilities Blücher spoke of, had the power to transform occurrences into events²⁸ and interrupt the normal flow of historical and personal time.

It is natural, I suppose, that while walking up and down among these volumes, thoughts would occur to me I never had before. Over the years I have seen many scholars' libraries, but suddenly I realized that this was not like those libraries. This was not the library of people who trusted in the stability of the world. Everything one needs is here; everything to start all over again almost anywhere. As has been suggested more than once, they never

25 Again: "He was the first [person] to be concerned with the question 'What are human motives like' and to face the possibility [they are all] bad." The introspection and conviction feed back into one another, but the introspection in the end can never cleanse or annul the conviction; only confirm it.

26 I recall one incident in particular after she had been to see the film *The Sorrow and the Pity* by French director Marcel Ophüls. That film, about the fall of France, triggered many memories for her, and she talked for a long time about what life had been like as a refuge in Paris during that dark period.

27 With among others Walter Benjamin, whose nickname was Benji. Arendt also taught Heinrich Blücher how to play chess. "Yesterday I played chess with Benji for the first time and beat him in a long and interesting game. He was the perfect gentleman," said Blücher; to whom Arendt replies, "I am extremely proud you beat Benji. It reflects well on my [teaching]." See letters dated Paris, 9.15.37, and Geneva, 9.16.37, in Arendt/Blücher, *Within Four Walls* (op. cit.), pp. 39, 40.

28 Heinrich Blücher Archive, *How and Why Do We Study Philosophy*, Lecture 5, p. 26.

got over the fear that one morning they would wake up, rub their eyes, realize that the last thirty years had been a dream after all, and they would have to pack again and leave.²⁹ The love of philosophy always came to that; not debate in genteel surroundings, or “ambrosia, nectar, and little quarrels without meaning.”³⁰ Rather, the love of philosophy was just preparation for the day when you would have to carry it on your back.

In his beautiful poem "A Living Room", Theodore Weiss has a speaker ask the question:
“...how do you Americans manage?
Never to learn by heart beloved poems
For the dark and lonely times! Who are
Your companions then?”³¹

The first time I ever entered Heinrich Blücher's study, I found, among the stacks of photographs, tapes, and transcriptions, a volume of Hölderlin's poems. Towards the end of his career Blücher quoted Hölderlin often; most notably in a lecture that started with the same poem that inspired one of Heidegger's greatest essays, "Poetically Man Dwells."³² Hölderlin, living at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Blücher at the beginning and middle of the twentieth; both attempting to recover from remnants a Greek civilization that was visible by then only in fragments and ruins. It seemed strange to me that this tough man, this man from the working class should have been drawn to this most enigmatic of poets. Or was it? In 1954 Heinrich Blücher, invoking the poet Homer, said “The eyes of man are sun-like, because art comes along and makes them sun-like ...

29 “Even after years of living in safety in the United States, they did not feel secure. When the Deutschland-Vertrag, the treaty on Germany, was signed in May 1952, Blücher immediately expected the Russians to make mischief, with Arendt suddenly ending up 'in a trap', and she decided not to fly to Berlin 'under these circumstances'. Soviet premier Malenkov's resignation in 1955 gave Blücher [a] 'real fright', and anticipating serious trouble, he designated Bard College as 'meeting place' – 'in case of emergency'.”

Quoted from Lotte Kohler's introduction to Arendt/Blücher, *Within Four Walls* (op. cit.), p. xii.

30 Blücher's description of life among the Greek Gods in Heinrich Blücher Archive, *How and Why Do We Study Philosophy*, Lecture 13, pp. 93, 94.

31 Quoted from “A Living Room, for Hannah Arendt and Heinrich Blücher”, Weiss, *From Princeton...* (op. cit.), p. 392.

32 Hölderlin: "Voll Verdienst, doch dichterisch wohnt / Der Mensch auf dieser Erde" (Full of merit, yet poetically is man living on this earth). See Heinrich Blücher Archive, lecture entitled *India, and the Mythic-Poetic Mind of Man*, p. 1, and compare it to “... Poetically Man Dwells”, Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Translations and Introduction by Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1971), pp. 211 – 229. These lines, which on the tape recording Blücher recites in German are from the poem “In lieblicher Bläue” (In Lovely Blueness) and contain some of Hölderlin's most beautiful lines, e.g.: “In lieblicher Bläue blühet mit dem / Metallenen Dache der Kirchthurm. Den / Umschwebet Geschrei von Schwalben, den / Umgiebt die rührendste Bläue .../ Wenn einer / Unter der Gloke dann herabgeht, jene Treppen, / Ein stilles Leben ist es, weil, / Wenn abgesondert so sehr die Gestalt ist, die / Bildsamkeit herauskommt dann des Menschen, / Die Fenster, daraus die Glocken tönen, sind / Wie Thore an Schönheit. ...“ (In lovely blueness the steeple blossoms with its Metal roof. Around the floating swallows that cry it is surrounded by the most Moving blueness... If someone Then descends those steps beneath the bell, It is a still life, because When the figure is so detached, men's Plasticity is brought forth, The windows, and the sounding bells, are Like gates in beauty); and ends with the lines: “Sohn Laios, armer Fremdling in Griechenland! / Leben ist Tod, und Tod ist auch ein Leben” (Son of Laios, poor stranger in Greece! Life is death, and death is also a life). This poem was reconstructed by Norbert von Hellingrath from a prose text which Wilhelm Waiblinger published in 1823 in his novel *Phaeton*. See Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke: Historisch-kritische Ausgabe*, begonnen durch Norbert v. Hellingrath, etc. (Berlin: Propyläen-Verlag), vol. VI (1923), pp. 24-27, 490-492. The translation roughly follows Michael Hamburger, *Poems of Hölderlin* (Nicholson & Watson, UK, 1943), p. 227, which is based on the Hellingrath version, but the sequences of translated words have been repositioned and there is some retranslation.

art makes no request of us except one – to be loved.”³³ A century and a half earlier Hölderlin, calling upon that same poetic muse wrote the following lines:

Die tempelsäulen stehn
Verlassen in tagen der not....namlos aber ist
In ihnen der got, und die schale des dank
Und opfergefäss und alle heiligtümer
Begraben dem feind in verschwiegener erde.

Beim kampfspiel, wo sonst unsichtbar der heros
Geheim bei dichtern sass, die ringer schaut und lächelnd
Pries, der gepriesene, die müssigernsten kinder.
Ein unaufhörlich lieben wars und ists.

(The temple-columns stand
Forsaken in days of despair, yet even nameless
The god is within them and all that is sacred
The offering-bowls, the vessels vowed in thanks are
Entombed by the earth where no enemy can find them.

The age of games, when secret and unseen the
Acclaimed, the hero, sat with poets, watched the wrestlers
And smiled his praise at the grave and playful children.
It was, it is loving without end.)³⁴

We cannot know the inner life of another human being beyond what they have chosen to share with us. Heinrich Blücher was a man of enormous virtues and uncommon faults. His indifference to scholarship, strange for an academic, is something I found particularly hard to accept. His insistence on what others called "Socratic principle,"³⁵ even in practical matters, made it very difficult for the people who had to deal with his legacy after he died. It was not easy watching Hannah Arendt, especially as her health started failing, struggle with that legacy. Yet for all that, she never once complained to me about any of it or ever suggested that she would have wished for him to be anyone other than who he was. Many questions remain about that legacy but all who approach it should be aware of this: No one in those last years, watching her reading the manuscripts or listening to the tape recordings now housed at the Stevenson Library, could ever doubt the great love that she had for him or the great debt, personal and intellectual, she felt that she owed him. He was a man who came into this world with very little, who lived through dark times few

33 See Heinrich Blücher Archive, "Homer, 1954" and "Description of the Lectures". All of this is taken from the 1954 lecture course *Sources of Creative Power* given at the New School for Social Research.

34 The lines are quoted in Stefan George, *Sämtliche Werke in 18 Bänden*, Band XVII, p. 58, citation on pp 121. George concatenated them from several lines in two separate Hölderlin poems, "Der Mutter Erde" and "Am Quell der Donau," in Friedrich Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke: Gedichte 1800 – 1806*. The translation roughly follows Olga Marx and Ernst Morwitz, *The Works of Stefan George* (University of North Carolina Press, 1974), p. 425, however several lines were retranslated.

35 For example: "Some of his [Blücher's] friends thought ... he did not write as a matter of Socratic principle." Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt (op. cit.)*, p. 432.

of us will ever see; but who transformed his life through the power of philosophy into something of great worth. His devotion to his students, his colleges, and to philosophy was an inspiration. And we, who knew him, when we left here, did not walk into the world empty handed.

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