On Misunderstanding Allan Bloom: The Response to The Closing of the American Mind

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"Though it be honest, it is never good to bring bad news."
—William Shakespeare, Anthony and Cleopatra

Allan Bloom’s The Closing of the American Mind, a book David Rieff claims “decent people would be ashamed of having written,”1 has fired more debate and given rise to more controversy than any in recent memory, even more than Edward Said’s Orientalism. Excoriated as an elitist, an enemy of democracy, an antifeminist, a follower of Leo Straus, and a romantic throwback to the Hutchins era at the University of Chicago by some, Bloom is extolled by others as a rare analyst of American political life, a learned defender of philosophy, a vigilant censor of today’s students for their shortcomings, a clear-sighted critic of the inconsistencies within our thoughts about contemporary education, and a courageous champion of solid educational standards. It is not, as Harvey Mansfield would have it, that reviews of Bloom’s book “turned sour and resentful” only when “mainstream professors” joined the fray. The book has divided opinion from its first appearance. For example, of the twenty-eight short reviews examined for this essay, only fifteen are unequivocally favorable. Eight are exceedingly critical, and five take no position at all with respect to the book itself, presenting instead a profile of the author. The same holds for the thirty longer reviews also examined, all but four of which were written by professors, “mainstream” or not: sixteen are highly critical of the book, while eight approve of it with minor reservations and six warmly endorse it.2

Some blame for the controversy must be laid at Bloom’s feet. Many arguments are overstated and offensive. His dismay about the ignorance of students today and concern for their well-being are voiced in a contentious, almost supercilious, tone that vexes more than it attracts. Moreover, the core analysis of how imported European ideas have stultified our speech and thinking is difficult to follow and highly unconventional.

But Bloom’s critics deserve at least equal blame for overstating and misrepresenting his arguments. For example, Benjamin Barber’s ire over what he imagines to be Bloom’s attack upon democracy and Robert Paul Wolff’s con-

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temptuous dismissal of Bloom as one who has no compassion or sense of justice are simply unjustified. Similarly, Martha Nussbaum’s indignation about Bloom’s lack of attention to footnotes and precise textual analysis, illustrated by her assertion that his desire to read Plato’s Republic as irony is defended only in the footnotes to his translation of that work, demonstrates reprehensible ignorance on her part of his extensive “Interpretive Essay” that follows the translation.³ Again, by faulting Bloom for speaking of “eternal essences,” Edward Kaufmann unwittingly betrays himself as a critic who reads into the author what is not there. When he goes on to insist that it is archaic for Bloom to vaunt reason because a world fashioned by reason no longer exists, he shows how incapable he is of learning anything from Bloom.

In what follows I propose to examine the reviews of Barber, Nussbaum, and Rieff, as well as those by Charles Kesler, Kenneth Minogue, Alexander Nehemias, Peter Pouncey, and Richard Rorty to show that these authors have not understood the book. To illustrate how others have correctly interpreted Bloom’s argument while refusing total assent to it, I will call upon the reviews of Eva Brann, Jeffrey Hart, Sidney Hook, and John Podhoretz. Mansfield stands alone as one who understands and endorses all of Bloom’s arguments, but such total agreement may be merely an accident of circumstances, his primary goal being to show what is fallacious in Rorty’s attack upon Bloom. My procedure calls for a preliminary account of the book.

The Closing in Brief

It is only after the foreword by Saul Bellow, followed by his own preface and introduction, that Bloom turns to the exposition of his basic arguments. These he sets forth in three major parts containing several chapters and subchapters.⁴ The preliminaries are intended to win a sympathetic hearing for the more controversial arguments to follow. Thus, in the foreword Bellow draws upon his own experience and his novel Herzog to urge that Bloom speaks to what is needful in American academic life today and that, though showing its shortcomings, he points to its eventual redemption. Bloom’s preface is devoted to two basic themes. Insisting that he writes here as a teacher, his concerns being those of a teacher, he goes on to identify himself as a teacher persuaded that man remains one through time. Willing to acknowledge that times change, that different sorts of problems arise as they change, and even that men may have different questions and needs now than in earlier times, Bloom contends that those questions and needs reflect a basic unity of human experience and proclaims as his goal to remind us of such unity.

In the introduction, subtitled “Our Virtue,” Bloom moves to the offensive. Our virtue he identifies as openness, that is, willingness to entertain a variety of ideas and to welcome inquiry into other times and places. This virtue has, however, become a vice because it now causes us to be perplexed about what is
our own and what is important. In fact, insofar as we consider all things to be equally important or, better stated, to be of no real importance simply because they are relative, nothing is important to us any longer. To counter such openness, Bloom would like to entice students into becoming involved or interested, into having firm beliefs about something, even if such beliefs are no more than prejudices. Deep attachment to particular opinions quickens the spirit and intensifies the thrill of liberation that comes from subsequently learning why such opinions are limiting, an experience that he deems the beginning of education.

Bloom offers no refutation of relativism here. He contents himself with tracing the development of its appeal, pointing to the follies it brings about in university studies, and drawing attention to its consequences. That exegesis, combined with his defense of encouraging prejudices and then liberation from them, points to the way out of the relativist trap, namely, by quickening a now moribund spirit of inquiry.

Part one contains Bloom’s psychological and sociological account of today’s students. As a touchstone, he frequently compares them with their predecessors of a generation ago. He does so in four chapters, the first three exploring how and why today’s students are so intellectually vapid, and the last—twice as long as the preceding three—describing the relationships they have with one another, their parents, and society at large and explaining how these have arisen.

For Bloom, American students arrive at the university today without bringing any tradition or general world view from home or high school. They were not always such empty vessels. Until quite recently their knowledge of the Bible and of the basic principles of the American Founding served as something of a tradition. It has disappeared now, partly because of a general falling away from religious instruction and partly because of the widespread debunking of the American Founding.

Bloom finds nothing within the university to replace that tradition. As one who believes books to be the core of education, he has been dismayed to learn how little students now read and how little they are affected by the few books they do read. In place of books, Bloom claims, students now have music—bad music. His colorful and intemperate critique of rock music has aroused great furor, especially among the young. His critics usually fail to note, however, that Bloom speaks here as one who loves music. He views it as central to the education of the passions and wishes merely for young people to be exposed to music that elevates the passions and moves the imagination to loftiness.

In these three chapters, Bloom moves gradually from critique and analysis of today’s students to that of the political world in which they live. Whereas most readers readily assent to his criticisms about how academic fashions have resulted in a debunking of the American Founding and how a general turning away from religious belief has left the young with no sense of traditional morality, they become uneasy about his attempts to show that most people—
not excepting Ronald Reagan—are friendly to rock music mainly because of its economic success. Bloom, however, insists upon following our thoughts to their consequences in action.

Nor is he reluctant to shock. The following, for example, strikes one as an unseemly paean to misplaced social pride: “There is hardly a Harvard man or a Yale man any more. No longer do any universities have the vocation of producing gentlemen as well as scholars. Snobbism of the old sort is dead” (89). Yet it is merely a rhetorical reminder of an alternative to today’s dominant egalitarianism, one that played an intellectual function, however strange it may now appear. For Bloom, inability to view the opinions of our day critically abets our enslavement to them and prevents us from gaining the practical wisdom needed to defend what is sound in them. He might have made his point more persuasively had he been content to argue that our openness has quite arbitrary limits insofar as we refuse to question what is now generally accepted. Had he done so, however, he would certainly have attracted far fewer readers.

Above all, Bloom traces the new relationships to the perverse success of modern political thought, especially its emphasis on the rejection of traditional ties. Because nothing has taken the place of such ties, youth today is without guidance. It is Rousseau who first recognized this dilemma, not Bloom, and Rousseau who first proffered a solution: act as though nature has given us guidance, whether it has in fact done so or not (115-16). Indeed, like Emile’s tutor, Bloom is primarily intent upon providing students with an education, and his references to literature here illustrate how he would educate their passions.

In part two, Bloom reveals the way modern philosophy affects current opinions and speech. The analysis is set forth in eight fairly short chapters about two major points: first, how the early modern break with ancient and medieval philosophy leads to the Enlightenment attempt to empower reason, as opposed to the ancient and medieval attempt to mediate between those who rule and those who pursue wisdom; and, second, how the issues raised by Enlightenment thinkers occasion Nietzsche’s critique of reason and then Heidegger’s radical historicism. Bloom considers Nietzsche to have most severely refuted the possibility of life according to reason, followed by Heidegger, but also argues that Freud and Weber have greatly undermined that life. The analysis, moving across several themes from the attack upon the bourgeois to the elevation of the self and on to the development of cultural relativism, is difficult to follow. In part this is because Bloom advances it by oblique references, especially with respect to Nietzsche, and in part because Bloom, not content merely to explain the evolution of modern thought, also strives to show its shortcomings, often doing so all too elliptically.

One way to approach this issue is to contrast Bloom’s procedure with the manner in which his former co-author, Harry V. Jaffa, would have liked to see him proceed. With the ancients, Bloom insists that one cannot determine the character of the best political regime without first inquiring into what man is by
nature and thus into the kind of life that brings him closer to perfection. The moderns rejected that quest in favor of something more practical, asserting that nothing in man’s nature obliges him to live in political association. Now, however, this “state of nature” foundation for modern political philosophy is denied. As a consequence, Bloom indicates, the political principles of modernity—freedom, equality, and all the rights following from them—have no ground (162-63; also 197). Intent upon pointing out the impasse to which modern thought leads us, he sees no reason to provide that grounding here.

Jaffa, in a speech delivered at George Washington University shortly after Bloom’s book was published, took him to task for neglecting the political in favor of the intellectual. For Jaffa the primary issue was to understand the foundation of the American regime and affirm its soundness, and he wanted Bloom to go beyond refutation to identify as well as defend what is right by nature or what is simply true. Even had he appreciated the fuller implications of Bloom’s argument, namely, showing both why the modern attacks on the ancient understanding of nature and natural right are not sound and why those attacks have nonetheless succeeded, they would not have been sufficient for Jaffa. Bloom’s goal is to explore what it means to be human and investigate the tensions within human existence, the ones arising from the conflict between man’s natural and political needs as well as between his desire for the good and for the satisfaction of his passions. He deems it more important to understand the reason for these tensions and to see what they point to than to become enmeshed in attempts to resolve the question (see 186-87). Jaffa’s demand is unreasonable, then, for it both ignores Bloom’s point that the moderns have not argued soundly even though their doctrine now reigns and implies that the philosophical quest is terminated.

Part three of Bloom’s book is an account of the university as it might be or even as it was intended to be, and of what it has become. Though he extols the need for universities in a democratic regime, he deplores the fact that ours are not the requisite ones. This part consists of three chapters.

In the first, Bloom explains why democratic polities need universities. He does so by looking once again at the history of political philosophy, for this permits him to underline what he views as the necessary tension between the pursuit of wisdom and the exercise of political rule that existed until modern times. Though he argues the necessity for universities in regimes such as ours, he does not think they should therefore minister to the regime. Rather, because they offer those in them the best life possible and the young who pass through them otherwise inconceivable vistas, they are to be tolerated and supported by society.6

Never did I think that the university was properly ministerial to the society around it. Rather I thought and think that society is ministerial to the university, and I bless a society that tolerates and supports an eternal childhood for some, a childhood whose playfulness can in turn be a blessing to the society around it (245).
Here, as in the beginning of the book, Bloom sets forth his concern about encouraging citizens to break away from unexamined opinions of the day and, drawing on Tocqueville, explains why the universities alone can foster such liberation. To learn to doubt is insufficient, for our present dilemma can be traced in part to our hasty rejection of everything but current doctrines. If reason is to function as a sound guide, we must be aware of possibilities other than those now prized and have a clear view of the range of past and present alternatives to current options. Only to the extent that the university stands aloof from those who demand its enlistment in the causes of the day can it train reason to be discriminating. To foster the investigation of alternatives, it cannot be a party to any.

It must also stand as a safe-haven for ideas no longer welcome in the larger society. Precisely because our universities are rooted in a democratic regime, they must preserve for students the experiences they will not normally acquire in that regime. Students must learn to read and to argue with authors who urge nondemocratic regimes and ways of thinking. Bloom’s university stands in the same relationship to society as philosophy: it preserves the memory of higher goals while pointing to the inadequacies of current pursuits.

The university is, however, no longer able to fulfill this function due to the unusual success Enlightenment philosophy has had with us, the university being a product of the Enlightenment and its ministerial role to society a working out of that movement’s principles. Beginning with the Enlightenment notion that philosophy can help the city and can share power, Bloom draws attention to the inevitable lowering of philosophic standards such power-sharing entails. The success of the Enlightenment project of linking knowledge and power has culminated in disdain for all learning that is not useful and thus for speculative inquiry, even though both are of great value for a viable democracy.

In the second chapter, Bloom urges that the collapse of the university as a safe-haven for thoughtfulness is most graphically portrayed in the 1969 student takeover of Cornell. He is at his most intemperate here, all too able, nearly two decades after the event, to describe in scathingly contemptuous tones the ways colleagues and administrators conducted themselves during and immediately after the siege. Nonetheless, Bloom’s tale is not mere ranting by the disaffected. Bitter and moralistic to be sure, it also aptly illustrates his earlier arguments. Teachers, ignorant of the merit of what they taught, could hardly withstand student criticism or calls for change. Students, hungering after a different kind of teaching but having no clear idea of what it might encompass, were ill-prepared to resist the impassioned pleas of their fellows.7

In sum, Bloom urges a university curriculum for educating students in freedom, in its limits and requisites as well as its rights. In the last chapter, he shows why none of the current programs provides such a curriculum and argues cogently for the “good old Great Books approach.” He does so despite being “perfectly well aware of, and actually agree[ing] with, the objections to the
Great Books cult.” It is, if nothing else, a means of bringing faculty and students to share in a common core of readings, thereby fostering unity and avoiding the now prevalent separation between the disciplines.

Bloom’s argument in The Closing of the American Mind centers on the question of democracy. His basic contention is that a democratic polity can be preserved only if its citizens are taught both to reason wisely and to think carefully about the alternatives to it. He recognizes tacitly the intellectual and economic inequalities existent among his fellow citizens and the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of eliminating these differences and their causes. Given the purpose of this book, however, there is no reason for him to address that question. Bloom speaks about the gifted and the privileged because they have comprised the major part, though not the totality, of the students he has taught. His goal is to show how and why even favored students learn so little and develop so poorly in our best universities today, he is under no obligation to prove that the education of those less fortunate is at least equally faulty.

Bloom examines the larger society as well as its opinions and dominant activities both to persuade us that the souls of students today are as flat as he claims and to identify what has brought this about. The former goal leads him to propose that a deep and thorough transformation of modern philosophy is reflected in life and thought today. Although his analysis of the debate culminating in that transformation reveals his own philosophic predilections, one need not share them in order to appreciate the validity of the analysis. The latter is essentially an exposition of the history of modern philosophy and deserves to be evaluated as such. In an even more pronounced manner, Bloom’s ringing disapproval of contemporary habits permeates his account of the way modern philosophy affects daily life. Still, the issue is less acquiescence in his dismay about the way we now act than determination of how accurately he describes the relationship between modern philosophy and our thoughts and actions today. In other words, the basic questions his critics should have raised are whether Allan Bloom is correct when he claims that the minds of America’s students are closed and, if so, whether he has identified the real causes of the closing. Their obtrusions fall wide of the mark.

**Bloom’s Critics**

They attack him, above all, for being antidemocratic. He is also charged with being elitist and antifeminist. Criticism of his purported elitism is invariably accompanied by allegations that he thereby reveals himself as a follower of the late Leo Strauss and a product as well as a supporter of the Great Books program promoted by Robert Maynard Hutchins during his presidency at the University of Chicago. The arguments against Strauss are basically *ad hominem* and blithely ignore that Bloom’s single reference to him is about a characterization of modernity with which they would all agree (see 167). Those against
the Great Books program are more nuanced, but ultimately agree on blaming the presumptuousness of anyone who proposes that education can be reduced to having read and discussed a finite list of books—a claim no one even remotely familiar with that program would dream of making. Bloom’s other sins, particularly his antifeminism and penchant for invoking European models, are castigated as revelatory of a neoconservative political stance.

Criticism as Partisanship

*An Enemy of the People*

Benjamin Barber, David Rieff, and Richard Rorty are especially excised about what they perceive as Bloom’s antidemocratic penchant.

*Barber, for example, views Bloom’s book as “a raging assault on liberal tolerance and democratic education” and is irate that liberals and egalitarians have been so willing to accept what he finds antidemocratic in Bloom (61a). He seeks, therefore, to counter the indiscriminate acceptance of what he takes to be Bloom’s insidious attack upon the democratic way, beginning with a colorful, albeit inaccurate, account of how Bloom tricks his readers:*

> What we have here is an extraordinary and adept exercise in the Noble Lie aimed at persuading Americans that philosophy is superior to ordinary American life and philosophers superior to ordinary American citizens; and consequently this nation’s higher education ought to be organized around the edification of the few who embody philosophy rather than the many who embody America (62a).

To be sure, Bloom does hold philosophy and philosophers in high esteem. Without recourse to deceptive practices of any sort, he gives reasons for his views and for what he considers to be lacking in American life today. Barber gives none for his opposing views. Nor when blaming Bloom, and through him Leo Strauss, for thinking that the real battle is between the ancients and moderns (63a) does Barber indicate why that view is erroneous.

A recurrent theme in Barber’s article is that Bloom wrongly deplores the Athenians’ having sentenced Socrates to death (62a, 63a, 64a, 64b). Yet Barber neither explains why he believes that Socrates deserved death nor how his being put to death shows the superiority of democratic rule, even though his argument calls for him to do both. He does, however, suggest why democracy is best: convinced that there is no truth as such, that today we must live with uncertainty and thus be tolerant of those who differ from us in order not to repeat former wrongs committed in the name of “Truth,” Barber is perfectly content to countenance the doubts that inspire democracy (65b). He likewise reveals a firm reluctance to challenge the soundness of the beliefs that also inspire democracy—beliefs, for example, in human equality, the need for independence among all men, and the ability of the individual to govern himself well.
Barber's basic quarrel with Bloom is over his low view of democratic man's intellectual ability. His own ire leads him to parody Bloom's argument, to portray him as making claims he does not make (see 64a, Bloom's supposed penchant for "highly selective, closed schools" and desire to save philosophy not "by handing out Great Books to small minds, but by locking the library doors"). He also misrepresents Bloom's urging that the university not minister to society. As was noted above, Bloom's point is simply that the university is to be aloof from society, to be useless in the best sense so that students can freely explore the life of the mind and that the university not become a training ground for industry or government. For Barber, this reveals how intent Bloom is on sacrificing the many so that the few may be educated (64a). Consequently, Barber portrays Bloom as a spokesman for a closed society, one in which rulers will defer to philosophers, and universities will be limited to those who reflect (65).

Resting his tirade against Bloom on rhetorical flourish, Barber claims to prefer doers to thinkers, insisting that "America's true philosophers are not bookmen or academicians or theorists" but poets, essayists, lawyers, and moral leaders (65a). His own examples mock him, for each one is known for careful reading of books and academic treatises. In sum, Barber's article is of a piece with that by Richard Rorty, but Rorty's is much more carefully argued even if not so colorfully written.

Rorty's "Straussianism, Democracy, and Allan Bloom, I: That Old-Time Philosophy" attacks Bloom qua Straussian and qua antirelativist to make a case for Deweyan historicism. He opens his critique by citing Bloom's definition of "the real community of men" (see Bloom, 381) to portray his antidemocratic bias or reserved praise of democracy, a tendency Rorty sees as linking Strauss and his followers. In Rorty's view, Bloom's great transgression is to speak for philosophy and philosophers rather than for the social sciences and humanities and those who promote them in the university, intellectuals (28c).

Rorty's critique provides no overall view of Bloom's book. He concentrates on arguments in part three and occasionally cites passages from the introduction. His own argument consists of an introduction (28a-30a) in which he tries to identify the way Bloom argues and how that harkens back to Strauss as well as to point out the antidemocratic and anti-intellectual thrust of the book. The antidemocratic argument involves, among other things, Bloom's (and supposedly Strauss's) unwillingness to distinguish between public and private judgment: however contemptible the democratic philosopher finds video games in comparison to poetry, says Rorty, he will not let the law reflect any bias about such matters. Its anti-intellectual bent is its antihistoricist opposition both to those who do not follow the Strauss/Bloom opinion that there is a nature of the good or a timeless tension between the philosopher and society (28c), and to those willing to countenance alternative interpretations of the philosophers' writings rather than to argue for right versus wrong understandings (29-30).
Rorty then discusses what he takes to be the key questions for evaluating Bloom's book: (1) whether he is right about American universities; (2) whether Plato or Dewey is right concerning the existence of a higher truth; and (3) whether these two questions can be answered independently (30a-32c). Rorty never does provide an answer to the first, primarily because he does not address the end of education; he seems not to know what universities are supposed to teach students, for he merely claims that learning—reading, writing, and talking—is good without saying what it is good for (32a-b, 32b). The mood of the moment is what counts, provided it seems right; questions of higher truth or intrinsic merit are less important than those that explain current phenomena like elections (32-33). With respect to the second question, Rorty views Bloom and Strauss as arguing that one must always go back to first principles—that is, decide whether Plato is right about truth—and contends for the merits in the Deweyan view that one must be content to sort through the alternatives posed through time and decide on the best one according to our common sense. On the basis of a highly questionable reading of Plato, Rorty decides that Dewey and his modern companions have a much better understanding of the way things are (30b-31b). Gentle worldliness allows Dewey, Rawls, and others to see more clearly how opposing opinions may be balanced in a democracy so as to achieve fairness and some of the other goods cherished in such a regime. Rorty's basic presuppositions keep him from asking about the goodness of such a regime (31a-b).

Far less interested in determining what is good or just than in describing what happens in political societies and how such events can be encouraged or thwarted (albeit without asking why they should be encouraged or thwarted) Rorty concludes with a plea for both sides to lower the level of offensive rhetoric and for Americans generally to lower their aspirations (32b-33b). The merit of his critique is the strong case he makes for Deweyan historicism; its failing the weakness of his account of Plato and of what Strauss and his followers attempt in their studies of Platonic dialogues. At times, the charges are ludicrous (see 29b-30a, 30b, 32a); at other times, merely inadequate (30c-31a and 31a-b). Crucial to his rejection of Bloom and Strauss, for example, is the assumption that there are no "immutable standards," that things have changed radically through time (30b), but Rorty does no more than assert it. Again, he innocently admits that he and fellow Deweyans dislike Thrasyvachus and Hitler, but have no interest in showing why they are to be rejected, that is, why they are wrong (32-33). In part, the inadequacy here stems from Rorty's willingness merely to state Dewey's opinions as correct without further defense (see 30c); in part, to his unargued commitment to the idea of progress. The basic issue is whether the questions have truly changed through time or whether the fundamental alternatives remain the same regardless of the way the questions are now formulated (see 31b).

In "The Colonel and the Professor," David Rieff likens Bloom to Oliver
North, claiming that Bloom provides the intellectual foundation for what North attempted to do. Association with Leo Strauss, the Great Books program, and the Olin Foundation make Bloom an enemy of democracy for Rieff. Even Bloom's "defiantly literal translation of Plato's Republic" indicates to Rieff that he is not a very democratic or tolerant man. And further proof of Bloom's reprehensible character is that "in the accompanying commentary, he attacks Cornford's mildly modernizing translation for aiming to be accessible" (950c). Clearly, there is little argument or analysis here, Rieff delighting above all on casting _ad hominem_ aspersions.

He does, however, take issue with Bloom's notion of education, but one wonders what he is thinking about: "Bloom's extraordinary assumption (the cornerstone of his book, really) that civilization and education are the same thing, indeed his total identification of civilization with repression, leads to a position which excludes not only compassion but simple humanity" (960b). His elevation of learning—erudition says Rieff—above humanity is further evidence of Bloom's erroneous view of education (960c). The reference is to Bloom's claim that "man may live more truly and fully in reading Plato and Shakespeare than at any other time." Rieff is content to assert the higher importance of human experience.

Rieff's essay is a political denunciation of right-wing thinking, and Bloom is guilty by association. Rieff does not show that the book itself is right-wing or antidemocratic; he gives no evidence of having understood it well enough to be able to make such an argument.

"Suppose truth were a woman . . ."

Martha Nussbaum, Kenneth Minogue, Peter R. Pouncey, and Alexander Nehemas also accuse Bloom of being antidemocratic, and then go on to fault him for antifeminist attitudes and providing insufficient evidence to buttress his arguments.

Nussbaum's essay is divided into three parts. The first, something of a summary of the book, points to what she will later criticize, and distorts Bloom's arguments in order to make them more open to criticism. She begins by quoting from a passage by the Stoic Musonius to define philosophy, then insists that Bloom sees philosophy as much more theoretical and therefore not to be applied to social problems (20a with 20b). The error in her characterization is that Bloom does want to raise all of the questions pertinent to philosophy, political as well as metaphysical, but in an orderly manner. He does not view philosophy as reason run rampant, but as reason applied carefully. To ask about eternal truths is not to neglect social justice; it is merely to look more deeply into basic issues. To make her case, Nussbaum would have to show that Socrates
was involved in social pursuits rather than in trying to reveal eternal truths, but of course she cannot do that. Thus her real goal is to present a different view of philosophy without admitting that it runs counter to the Socratic view.

In the second part, she faults Bloom’s procedure under three different headings. First, she blames him for generalizing too much and basing his description of today’s students on those privileged few he has taught in the better private universities. Contending that the sample is not representative of the United States today, Nussbaum urges suspicion about what he says of American students. Yet no one having contact with American students denies the validity of Bloom’s claims; that it is true even of the best and most privileged students only shows how advanced is the decay.

Secondly, she claims that Bloom’s ignorance of Indian and Chinese thought keeps him from knowing that self-criticism is as prevalent in those cultures as in Western culture. Though her criticism is accurate, it must be noted that this is far from an essential part of his argument.

Nussbaum’s third criticism of Bloom’s procedure, namely, how he functions as a philosopher, rests on three points: that he does not discuss texts at length or show how he interprets them; that he misrepresents ancient thought on the emotions, especially spiritedness, and on whether feminism is contrary to nature; and that he neither argues like a philosopher nor cites contemporary philosophical texts. The first point centers on her rejection of his reading of the Republic by indicating that it comes from Leo Strauss and is “both bizarre and not accepted by any major non-Straussian interpreter of the text, beginning with Aristotle” (23a). Apart from the unusual appeal to majority rule for judging the validity of an interpretation, Nussbaum presents herself here (wittingly or not; see note 4 above) as woefully ignorant of Bloom’s own detailed analysis of the Republic. The second is set forth in detailed arguments that cite other sources Bloom might have consulted, the point being that those sources present a view different from the one he attributes to the ancients. Here the question is whether by “the ancients” Bloom means the whole of Greek and Roman philosophy, or merely Plato, Aristotle, and those who followed their basic lead. To make her point on feminism, Nussbaum is reduced to most obscure evidence, e.g., a papyrus document stating that Plato taught women in his philosophical school (see 24a, n. 6). The third point is that Nussbaum wants Bloom to define and analyze relativism and also to prove by citation and discussion that contemporary American philosophy is truly weak.

In the third part of her essay, Nussbaum closes the circle. Socrates gives way to the Socratic-Stoic tradition, because Socrates is limited to the Socrates of the Apology and the Euthyphro, no mention being made of the Socrates of the Symposium, let alone of the Phaedo, Meno, or Protagoras. This Socrates is practical and concerned only with practical reason, not metaphysics. His view of learning is said to be popular, one that incluces all people, and is thus opposed
to Bloom's elitism. Here, too, Nussbaum misreads Bloom, even going so far as to think that "Bloom presents himself to us as a profoundly religious man, who deplores the decline of revealed religion and of the Bible's authority in American society" (24c), a view supported by no argument in Bloom's book. Nothing Nussbaum says here suggests that she has understood either Bloom's political thought or why he praises religious belief in others.

She is more concerned with Bloom's rejection of democracy and of the university serving democratic society, for—momentarily forgetting the occasion for Socrates' Apology and its conclusion—Nussbaum denies that there is necessary tension between the many and philosophy. Moreover, she misrepresents Bloom's view of the university. He does not claim that students should not investigate social justice or other practical problems in the university, but rather that they should strive to find their intellectual roots, that is, what truly makes them problems of justice. He thinks students must look beyond things they do not like and ask why they do not like them or, better yet, ask about what is base and ugly in them.

Nussbaum also rejects Bloom's praise of the Great Books, not because they are wrong in themselves but because they can be used wrongly. Again, that is not the issue. Her rejection of the Great Books leads her to praise the education reform suggested in the 1945 Harvard proposal, General Education in a Free Society, and to insist upon the need for "genuinely democratic thought" about education. Bloom, however, wants us to question the merits of democracy as well as of every other system; he wants us to think about the purpose of education.

Kenneth Minogue faults Bloom's argument for being peculiarly American, an "account of a messalliance between German high culture and American low taste, in which the distinctively British element in modern thought hardly appears" and insists that "had it done so, a significantly different story could have been told" (786d). Consequently, Minogue finds it hard to agree with Bloom's "special version of the history of ideas" (786c), which he claims Bloom takes from Leo Strauss, and which focuses on Machiavelli as making a break with classical thought. Content to assert that this is not the philosophy "taught in most professional departments of philosophy" (786b), Minogue does not attempt to counter this version with one of his own.

Nor can he really bring himself to fault Bloom, for he agrees with too much of what Bloom sees as bad in America. He is uneasy about Bloom's view of philosophy, especially about his belief "now almost everywhere discarded, in the perennial character of the questions and answers of classical philosophy" (786d). The observation betrays how poorly Minogue understands Bloom's argument: Bloom does, indeed, insist on the perennial character of the questions of classical philosophy, but not on the perennial character of its answers except insofar as they represent the fundamental alternatives, that is, insofar as what we think now has already been expressed by the ancients.
Peter R. Pouncey, president of Amherst College, used the September 1987 opening convocation to express his disagreement with Bloom, not least because of Bloom’s passing reference to the naïveté of an Amherst freshman (see Bloom, 233-34). Pouncey, quoting W.K.C. Guthrie on the diversity of opinions within the intellectual climate of fifth-century Athens, faults Bloom for failing to understand that intellectual disagreement is nothing new. He also quotes extensively from Plato’s Apology and Republic, Aristophanes’ Clouds, and a little from Xenophon’s Memorabilia to indicate, in agreement with some modern scholars, that Socrates may have been as much of a rascal as Aristophanes suggested, the point being that Bloom makes too much of Socrates as one upon whom we should model our life and that we should be more willing to recognize how uncertain all people are of what they believe (24a). Convinced that the formal search is all-important, that college is where people are urged to look more deeply at their opinions, Pouncey incorrectly chides Bloom for claiming that the ultimate answers to our problems were given in the past (24c) and ignores that he is basically in agreement with Bloom about the purpose of college. He does so partly because Bloom is too judgmental for his taste. Pouncey would like to say that all ideas are good or, at the very least, deserving of respect; Bloom is more willing to dismiss ideas he deems nefarious. In this regard, Pouncey misses Bloom’s point; he becomes one of Bloom’s “nice” people.

Pouncey disagrees with Bloom for three reasons: first, Bloom makes generalizations that are too sweeping (11a-b); second, he links ideas in too abstract a manner—Pouncey would like a step-by-step argument to show how different concepts and thinkers are related to one another (11b); and third, he does not provide detailed analysis of authors or passages, making instead a rapid association between authors and ideas that Pouncey deems unwarranted (e.g., 174, Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Freud). Rather than explain why Bloom’s association is wrong, Pouncey tries to dismiss it by ad hominem comparisons between Bloom and former secretary of education William Bennett (11b-c).

Within this second group of critiques, Alexander Nehemas’s “Swallowing Goldfish” stands out as being the most thoroughly argued. The title is Nehemas’s way of reminding us of the antics of Harvard, Yale, and Princeton students during the period whose passing Bloom regrets, antics Nehemas deplores almost as much as he does the class these students represented. He denies that Bloom’s book is “a distinguished part” of the broad critique of American education and insists, rather, that Bloom is an enemy of the view “that theoretical understanding, practical utility, freedom and social justice are all served by education” (12a).

Like Nussbaum, Nehemas claims that Bloom advances his views by giving “a stunningly revisionary reading of the Republic” through his denial of both the notion that the city described by Socrates is meant to exist in reality and that the rule of philosophy is intended to “guarantee a good life for the city as a
whole” (12a). Asserting that Bloom’s book is primarily an attempt to make Leo Strauss’s views popular, Nehemas highlights—in order thereby to refute—Strauss’s major teachings, that is, the constant tension between philosophy and society, the recourse philosophers have to esoteric writing, and the emphasis on reading the philosophers as they wish to be read.

He focuses on Bloom’s discussion of culture, especially his claim that a culture is above criticism from anything outside itself, and insists that all one needs to do is pick at strands of the culture to criticize it (12d). But this merely shows that Nehamas has not understood Bloom: what makes such criticism valid, especially to the culture itself? Whereas Bloom is trying to show the difficulty of finding standards once reason is denied, Nehemas has already rejected it.

Nehemas finds the book “disturbing” for a number of reasons: first, because Bloom does not give detailed arguments to support the opinions he ascribes to Plato (13a-b); second, because Bloom’s views of what is true and good come very close to positions lately held by American conservatives (13b); and third, because Bloom thinks the “great classical philosophers were aristocratic” insofar as they thought reason should rule and, recognizing that this would never happen, prudently decided to ally themselves with the wealthy (13b).

None of these criticisms withstands scrutiny. First, Bloom’s goal is not to explain Plato; he merely refers to questions raised by Plato to illustrate his points. Second, that Bloom’s opinions are conservative tells us nothing about their correctness. The third objection is more complicated; Nehemas raises it to show that Bloom lacks self-knowledge, for he too easily sides with the wealthy and erroneously tries to justify this penchant by attributing it to the philosophers. This is ad hominem, and it confuses two distinct points. First, either Bloom is correct about what the philosophers did historically or not. Secondly, his assessment that there is a naturally friendly disposition towards philosophy among the wealthy, the “gentlemen” as he likes to say, is likewise either correct or not. Here, however, Nehemas’s recollection of goldfish-swallowing becomes especially apt. Indeed, Bloom has been justly criticized by others, Eva Brann in particular, for undue optimism about a philosophical penchant among the wealthy.

**Philosophy and Politics**

Charles R. Kesler’s, “The Closing of Allan Bloom’s Mind, An Instant Classic Reconsidered,” is as idiosyncratic as the organ in which it appeared, the American Spectator. Unlike Bloom’s other critics, who attack him from the Left, Kesler attacks him from the Right. He begins by challenging Bloom’s apolitical stance, his unwillingness to see political philosophy as anything more than “politic philosophy,” that is, as a philosophy that preserves the possibility of
philosophy (16a-b) and also finds Bloom's portrait of the American mind exceedingly empty, even un-American or pro-European (15a-b). Moreover, deeming athletics or sportsmanship to shape American character even more than music, Kesler faults Bloom for speaking so much about music and not at all about athletics (15b-d).

Kesler is especially vexed, however, about Bloom's lack of interest in morality and thus in politics (16a-d). Wanting a new defense of natural right and a new definition of justice, he pays insufficient heed to the merit of Bloom's having revealed the inadequacy of the current attacks on them and thereby cleared the way to reopen the basic debate. Kesler would also have Bloom be more conservative, for he discerns that the book has an underlying conservative bent and, persuaded that conservatism is important and correct, he would like to make that bent explicit. Consequently, Kesler differs with Bloom about the role of the university. For Kesler, as for Jaffa, the university should serve society; it should teach the truth or truths of society, rather than be served by society (17b). When this critique is contrasted with that by Barber, namely, that Bloom does want the university to serve truth, one sees how thoroughly both Barber and Kesler miss his point: Bloom wants to open the debate anew, not present truths that close it off.

And Criticism as Scholarship

Eva Brann, Jeffrey Hart, Sidney Hook, John Podhoretz, and Harvey Mansfield, Jr., differ from the critics just discussed because they approach Bloom's book without preconceptions and consider it to have merit.

Brann's essay is guardedly positive: though there are many points in Bloom's book with which she disagrees, they are separate points rather than elements of a whole; in general, she agrees that he has identified a basic problem in American life. Her essay is divided into three parts, the first speaking about the book in general and its reception, the second setting forth her basic criticisms of the substantive arguments, and the third serving as qualified praise.

Brann differs from Bloom insofar as she perceives the real centers of learning to be the small colleges and not the universities (72). She also takes issue with his opinion that philosophy is not for everybody (73), but offers no evidence for her demurral apart from an observation that aristocrats are no more philosophical than democrats. Instead, she asserts that philosophy is universally needful (74). With respect to Bloom's apparent contempt for the citizens of democracy, Brann simply reminds us of the great musical, literary, and political accomplishments of otherwise undistinguished Americans (74).

In the second part of the essay, Brann faults Bloom for his historicist arguments, that is, for portraying ideas as representative of times (75-76). She also finds that he generalizes too much, usually without warrant, and that his gen-
eralizations are often wrongheaded. His remarks about Socrates are a case in point, for Brann would like Bloom to have portrayed Socrates as one who engaged in “comprehensible conversation,” not as a thoroughly enigmatic and thus unappealing person.

In the end, though, she praises Bloom for reminding us that we do need to think again about our difficulties and that such thought requires us to read good books with attentiveness.

Jeffrey Hart summarizes rather than critiques Bloom’s book, quoting liberally from it, and praises Bloom unstintingly throughout. On only two issues does he beg to differ. First, he thinks that Bloom wrongly neglects William James, Charles Sanders Pierce, T.S. Eliot, Walt Whitman, and Emily Dickinson—the last two, it should be noted, being figures Barber labels “true philosophers” in contrast to Bloom’s “bookmen, academicians, and theorists.” For Hart, Bloom is too European in his literary tastes. Secondly, he thinks Bloom wrongly neglects religion; deeply moved by our having gone beyond the unknown god so praised by the Greeks to one who has revealed Himself, Hart somehow fails to note that this God had done so even before the zenith of Greek civilization but not to the Greeks.

Sidney Hook claims to have “fundamental differences with Allan Bloom,” (127) to reject his “analysis of what is wrong with higher education in our day and therefore . . . his remedies,” (135) but thinks Bloom’s argument “has succeeded in arousing the country to the necessity, at long last, of a serious debate on what a serious education for modern men and women should be” (135).

Hook blames Bloom for being too naive about the curricular changes he would propose, for erroneously confusing subjectivism and relativism, and for failing to define key terms properly. Like so many of Bloom’s critics, Hook seems unable to judge Bloom simply on the merits of the arguments he sets forth and is compelled to allude to Bloom’s intellectual roots and putative companions. Yet he applauds Bloom for having “evoked the astonishing spectacle of the intellectual bankruptcy of the so-called political and cultural Left in its response to the positions he has developed in his book,” and for what so many others have decried, namely, his “sober, brilliant, and really quite devastating account of the barbarous attack on American universities in the sixties—an attack from whose consequences they are still suffering” (126).

For Sidney Hook, Allan Bloom is an absolutist who insists on a single good for man, whereas Hook presents himself as a moral relationist or objective relativist—the terms are his—who thinks that truth must be adapted to times and conditions. His practical sense keeps him from admitting to moral relativism, difficult as it may be to distinguish from moral relationism or objective relativism, not to mention subjectivism. But his emphasis on the need to address practical issues in contemporary terms causes him to miss Bloom’s basic point.

Allan Bloom does not for a moment pretend that there is no conflict in
politics or no need to subordinate one goal to another in certain circumstances. He insists, rather, that a clear view of what the goals are grounded in or why they are worth striving for is needed if one is to judge wisely. Hook’s error in calling Bloom an absolutist is that of Bloom’s students: on the first page of Closing, he tells us that when he questions their relativism they ask him, in “disbelief and indignation,” whether he is an absolutist. And, like the students, Hook fails to discern that Bloom argues for the older way of viewing things not because it is necessarily correct, but because it is pedagogically sounder; it forces people to think about why they value freedom and equality and what they are good for.

Hook’s disagreement with Bloom is due in part to careless reading insofar as he fails to distinguish between Bloom speaking in his own name as political advocate and Bloom speaking as intellectual historian (see 130a-b), and in part to the fact that, having already embraced the modern view, he is not willing to consider the alternative presented by Bloom (see 131-132). Thus Hook quotes liberally—indeed, exclusively—from the first chapter of Bloom’s book without comprehending its rhetorical structure. For example, citing Bloom’s statement that “nature should be the standard by which we judge our lives and the lives of peoples” (see 131a with Bloom, 38), Hook fails to note that it is part of Bloom’s explanation of how the image of the cave in Plato’s Republic illustrates his point about openness. This is clearly indicated in the very next sentence, not quoted by Hook: “That is why philosophy, not history or anthropology, is the most important human science.”

Consequently, Hook’s charge that Bloom is not sufficiently precise in his use of the terms “soul,” “nature,” and “reason” betrays his failure to see how these terms are used by Bloom to allude to an old and venerated discussion among philosophers. And his alternative to Bloom’s Great Books curriculum, far from being less naive, merely states the goals of that curriculum. Hook ignores that a Great Books curriculum is not a list written in stone; it does and must change from time to time. Such a curriculum differs from Hook’s, however, in that it does not presuppose the correctness of current views. In sum, the abyss that separates Hook from Bloom is one of misunderstanding (127a).

John Podhoretz, a former undergraduate student of Bloom’s, writes him an unabashedly laudatory letter about his book and points in detail to the many fine arguments he thinks it contains. Podhoretz faults Bloom, however, for misunderstanding both America and his younger generation; not the country as a whole but only a small part of it, the elite groups within the university, suffer from the sickness Bloom portrays. These groups threaten society, not the other way around. There is no need to protect the university nor even the wisdom of the university from the people; the First Amendment does that.

Podhoretz, like Kesler and Jaffa, differs with Bloom about the role of the university. In his view, it ought to be “a center of education,” that is, a center to educate the people about what they need to know and do, rather than
something like Plato’s best city. In keeping with this idea, he seeks to persuade Bloom that his praise of philosophy is unsuited for young people today. Because they are not capable of handling the doubt cast by philosophical debate and need something as morally supportive as religion, Bloom would do better to provide them with edifying poetry and fiction.

Harvey Mansfield’s critique appeared as a formal reply to Richard Rorty. It concentrates on Rorty’s attack on Bloom’s Straussianism, explaining what Strauss really stands for and why Rorty’s Deweyan historicism is both a poor substitute and unfair to Dewey. Mansfield begins by noting that Bloom has forced the establishment to stop ignoring Straussians and start trying to refute them (33b-34a), an effort that has resulted in labeling them as antidemocratic, elitist, and conservative.

The elitism charge finds expression in the attack against Bloom’s Great Books recommendation, and Mansfield identifies what he finds foolish and self-contradictory about Rorty’s criticism. Our liberal democracy is pluralist and thus necessarily fosters elitism (34a-b). To claim that the Great Books encourage the wrong elite, a white male elite, is to imply that an elite closer to the mass of people is better, but this becomes absurd when examined more closely (34b). The real reason for criticizing elitism or the Great Books approach is that Rorty and fellow “intellectuals” have lost faith in the intellect; for them, the intellect is not free from social and economic context or ethnic and sexual identity. They cannot imagine that authors might think beyond such limitations.

Rorty’s view comes out of his own historicism and affects his view of the university (34c-35a). For him, the university is and must be politicized, even though he would like it to be tolerant of all views. Yet by his own criteria, that ideal is extremely unlikely. Why would anyone give up trying to force his own opinions upon others?

This historicist view, according to Mansfield, also colors Rorty’s idea of what democracy is all about and keeps him from understanding how Bloom follows a Founders’ version of democracy (35a-36b). To make this point clear, Mansfield portrays what he calls a responsible democrat, that is, one who judges democracy in the light of good government, not the other way around. This involves appreciation of the danger of majority faction, the vices of republics, and the need for a sympathetic majority that can also be educated. Such a democrat “carries in his mind a mixed picture of what majorities easily appreciate and of what they need to appreciate but tend to resist . . . a mixture of what makes a democracy democratic with what makes it work.” Rorty’s only standard is the current fashion: “He does not notice that the modern philosophy whose grand project was to enlighten the people now takes, in its latest version, its enlightenment from the people.”
Mansfield concludes with a series of reflections on conservatism, arguing that anyone who believes there is a menace from Soviet imperialism comes quite close to the conservative camp, then reflects on political versus philosophical disagreement (36b-c). He finds Rorty self-contradictory on the Great Books, for his own criterion of following new trends should lead him to jump on the Great Books bandwagon. And Mansfield closes with a few remarks on how the Great Books are to be read, namely, for themselves and with a willingness to learn something (36c-37b). In general, his attack on Rorty, though witty and telling, is less significant than his demonstration that one may be a democrat and still learn from Bloom or an elitist and yet remain friendly to democracy.

Conclusion

These, then, are the reflections of some of Allan Bloom’s more interesting critics. Clearly, most have failed to address the major issues in his book, resorting instead to conjuring up imaginary issues and then doing battle against those specters with all the ire they could muster. It must also be evident, however, that Bloom is not a totally innocent victim. He has written in an especially provocative manner, hoping perhaps to provoke thought more than bile, but being nonetheless most importunate. Though one cannot accuse him of ambivalence, he can be faulted for lack of clarity. Too often, his arguments are abbreviated; they suggest or intimate, sometimes with unbecoming and unnecessary petulance, rather than explain and elucidate. A plea on Bloom’s behalf that detailed argument is misplaced in a book written for the larger public ignores that citing the names of Herodotus, Xenophon, Augustine, Kepler, d’Alembert, and Fichte—to name just a few of Bloom’s passing references—is no way to gain acceptance from such an audience. Besides, Bloom himself has acknowledged that he never expected the book to be read by the larger public.

It is not Bloom’s fault, however, that none of his critics has faulted him on his own terms for his reading of the history of philosophy. Martha Nussbaum’s errors have been outlined above, and others—most notably Dannhauser and Hook—have been dismayed by the poor quality of her analysis. Hook seems not to have learned from Nussbaum, for he treats Bloom almost as cavalierly. Bloom seems to have succeeded, inadvertently perhaps, in showing that the proponents of relativism are unable to do more than assert its validity and that those who think of themselves as liberal and tolerant are most unwilling to countenance disagreement with their fundamental convictions.

Yet this does not explain why those who would normally be sympathetic to Bloom’s arguments—Kesler and Jaffa come immediately to mind—have taken such exception. One reason is that they are more persuaded of their rectitude than Bloom and more willing to act on it. Whereas Bloom plays the role here of a persistent questioner calling into doubt unexamined truths of the day in
order to keep thoughtful debate alive, Kesler and Jaffa know the truth and want to cut off discussion in order to get on with politics. They, and here Podhoretz joins them, are intent upon molding society to make it fit for democracy. Bloom remains committed to plodding reason:

The United States is one of the highest and most extreme achievements of the rational quest for the good life according to nature. What makes its political structure possible is the use of the rational principles of natural right to found a people, thus uniting the good with one's own. Or, to put it otherwise, the regime established here promised untrammeled freedom to reason—not to everything indiscriminately, but to reason, the essential freedom that justifies the other freedoms, and on the basis of which, and for the sake of which, much deviance is also tolerated (39).

Differently stated, Bloom is a resolute educator. He wants learning to make us better human beings, to help us pursue the truth, and to make us ever wary of easy convictions. Though replete with criticism of current politics, his book is no political tract.

In this respect, the earlier parallel drawn between Edward Said's *Orientalism* and Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* bears restatement: both have written books whose chief merit is to have obliged their fellow academicians to reconsider what they seek to do as teachers and scholars and to have alerted the larger public to the many problems that plague purportedly disinterested research and learning. And both have been quite firmly rejected by their academic colleagues, though not by the learned public. The trouncing Said and Bloom have received from the reviews of academic colleagues surely puts the lie to the image of the university as a haven for impartial investigation and truth-seeking discussion. Then, again, in the way both have overstated their positions, they have called for the fire of their critics. In the end, it is a pity one cannot take the best of the two books, that is, the philosophic underpinnings of Bloom's argument and the practical consequences of Said's.

Notes

1. Complete bibliographical data for the authors and articles referred to in the body of this essay are given in the Appendix.
2. It is possible that Mansfield was thinking of the short reviews in making his remark about how debate turned "sour and resentful" when professors joined the fray, for only seven of those are written by professors. Nonetheless, four of those seven, including S. Frederick Starr, president of Oberlin College, write favorably about Bloom's book.
3. In claiming (23a and n. 5) that this account of Plato's *Republic* is the single instance in the *Closing of the American Mind* "in which Bloom does advance a definite interpretation of a text at comparative length (which is to say, about a page and a half)," Nussbaum has, in fact, brought together points Bloom makes in a number of different passages; see, for example, 102-3, 266-67, and 284-85. Werner Dannhauser's conjecture (19d-20a) that Nussbaum has drawn upon Bloom's "Interpretive Essay" in order to formulate this criticism is more insidious.
4. Will Morrissey's appreciation of the way the book fits together as a whole, in form as well as in content, contributes more to an understanding of Bloom's argument than George
Anastaplo’s criticisms of the revisions it underwent as a result of suggestions from the editors; see Morrissey, 148 and 150-51, with Anastaplo, 256 and n. 44.

5. Eugene Kennedy’s interview with Bloom, “The Scholar Who Made Education a Best Seller,” is especially important for the way it permits Bloom to explain his goals as a teacher. He insists that he is not against youth but wants, rather, to show them that all is not yet lost and to assure them that they can understand complex, important ideas on their own with the help of the great thinkers of the past.

Kennedy’s is one of five articles about Bloom to appear in the New York Times and should be compared with the others; see Atlas, Hechinger, Kimball, and Lehmann-Haupt. Other newspapers, magazines, and journals to publish more than one article on Bloom are the Washington Post, Allen and Starr; the San Francisco Chronicle, Fay and Rodgers explicitly offering opposing views; Newsweek, Gates and Will; Quadrant, Armstrong and Levin; New Oxford Review, Bellah and Devine; The American Spectator, Dannhauser and Kesler; Interpretation, Galston, Jaffa, Masters, Morrissey, and Neumann in a “Discussion”; the New Republic, Menand, then Mansfield and Rorty; and the Times Literary Supplement, Minogue and Rieff.

6. On this point, too, Jaffa faults Bloom. Here, as in the criticism discussed above, he contends that the university must be useful to the political regime and therefore cannot be aloof. Rather, it must show why natural right is sound and how we may defend ourselves against despotism.

These and other arguments against Bloom, all turning upon his purported preference for intellectual over political life, are developed at greater length in Jaffa’s review. Like his colleague, Harry Neumann, Jaffa finds Bloom to be ultimately a liberal and even a nihilist; see Jaffa, 136, 138, and Neumann, 158, 160. Philip Devine reaches a similar conclusion on different grounds; see 5a-6b.

7. For a measured critique of Bloom’s tale, see Anastaplo, 259-60, and 261-63 with nn. 38-40, 42.

8. This is not the place to attempt a vindication of Leo Strauss and his teaching. Those interested in the question will find Terence Marshall’s “Leo Strauss, la philosophie et la science politique,” Revue française de science politique, 35 (1985): 605-38 and 801-39 to be extremely helpful.

9. See Bloom, 380. Rieff’s attempt to read this phrase as praise of erudition is as erroneous as his copying of it: “Men may live more truly and fully in reading Plato and Shakespeare than at any other time, because then they are participating in essential being and forgetting their accidental lives.”

10. Bloom is intent upon making a case for reason, and showing how older ways favored the development of reason whereas modern ways cut it off. Perhaps Hook reads too quickly. In the passage quoted he misses Bloom’s use of the plural “peoples” (quoting him as saying “our own lives and the lives of people”) and thus of the cultural issue the recourse to Plato is meant to illustrate.

To seize Bloom’s purpose, the following passage, again from the first chapter, ought to be considered:

Thus there are two kinds of openness, the openness of indifference—promoted with the twin purposes of humbling our intellectual pride and letting us be whatever we want to be, just as long as we don’t want to be knowers—and the openness that invites us to the quest for knowledge and certitude, for which history and the various cultures provide a brilliant array of examples for examination (41).

Appendix

Bibliography of Reviews Consulted
Short Newspaper and Magazine Articles

4. Ezra Bowen, reported by Jack E. White, “Nietzsche by Another Name: A Scholar Charges that Universities have Banished Values and Value,” Time, 13 April 1987.

**Longer Critical Reviews**

27. David Rieff, "The Colonel and the Professor," *Times Literary Supplement*, 4 September 1987 (see also Minogue).
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