

ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: PHILOSOPHER KINGS, THEN AND NOW:
THE POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF IQ

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The most fundamental question of political philosophy is “who should rule?” Socrates famously argued in the *Republic* that philosophers were the most precise guardians of the best city. The question of intelligence is not a theoretical one; it is relevant far beyond the building of cities in speech. The importance we ascribe to measures of intelligence informs a broad range of policy questions and could challenge our democratic processes. This dissertation seeks to understand the relationship of the modern concept of IQ to Western political philosophy by investigating the role of intelligence for Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli, and contemporary psychometricians. Whereas intelligence has a moral dimension for the classical philosophers, Machiavelli emphasized the use of prudence in the service of ambition. Contemporary psychometrics presents intelligence as a distinct, amoral property. I argue that Freud and group psychology provide insight into the way democracy could relate to a hypothetical cognitive elite. I further suggest ways in

which we could make use of the modern IQ test to improve the quality of our political leadership and make use of an important Platonic theory without abandoning representative democracy as we know it.

PHILOSOPHER KINGS, THEN AND NOW:

THE POLITICAL PHILSOPHY OF IQ.

By

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Foreword

At this the grey-eyed goddess
Athena smiled, and gave him a caress,
her looks being changed now, so she seemed a woman

-Homer, *Odyssey*, translated by Robert Fitzgerald

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Problem of Intelligent Rule

The most fundamental political question, and the guiding question of classical political philosophy, is simply: “who should rule?”¹ As it originates pre-philosophically, the question is about who should rule in particular: this man or that man, one group or another. The root of the controversy arises from the natural conflicts that occur when a group of human beings come together and decide to do something in common. The still pre-philosophic refinement becomes “what sort of human being should rule,” or what qualities should be present in rulers. The reasonable, pre-philosophic answer to this question is also simple: the best kinds of human beings. The classical philosophers transformed this into a comprehensive question about the best political ordering, so that the object of classical political philosophy becomes the best regime. The best regime is comprehensive because it considers the whole of the city and its constituent parts, including what qualifies individual people to rule.

The ability to make good decisions pertaining to both war and domestic matters seems to be a self-evident quality of the effective ruler. For this reason, Pericles is said to be a man having practical judgment². This judgment must make use

¹ Cf Leo Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy?*, pg. 84

² Cf Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1140b 5-15

of a more general faculty of intelligence that allows one to understand and organize the world around one so that one is able to deliberate about what is possible. No one would willingly choose a stupid man to lead, unless he thought he could substitute his own judgment for that of the nominal leader. Because good decisions are bounded by our ability to comprehend, intelligence is the fundamental political quality. Other animals organize themselves into groups, such as bees or ants, but they have it within their natures to form specific kinds of communities. Human beings are unique in that we have the ability to form an infinite variety of political communities, but our variety and variability gives rise to problems that do not have solutions adequately addressed by instinct. Neither are our rulers conspicuously marked as with the insects. It seems obvious that we want the best rulers possible, but it is not obvious how to determine who those people are.

Classical philosophy tells us that we do not know who the best human beings are, or might be. The philosophers tell us that we have a name (*aristoi*) for such people, and that there are men who have claimed the name. This ignorance of who the true *aristoi* might be does not stop many, namely the sophists, from declaring that it is possible to teach men to be the best; in short, they declare it is possible to teach virtue. It is clear to Plato's Socrates that the sophists cannot give an adequate account of virtue, and so their teaching is counterfeit. The political art, however, seems to require both moral and intellectual virtue, because the intellectual tasks of ruling are not amoral. It is particularly evident in the statesmen who must deliberate about particular things: they must arrive at good solutions, they must be fair, their judgment should not be impaired by passions, and they should not be swayed from right action

by fear. They seem to need practical judgment, justice, moderation, and courage³. Practical judgment is particularly crucial because it is directed toward legislating in the broad sense and solving particular political problems in the narrower sense⁴.

Regardless of regime, whoever rules is responsible for solving problems, whether those problems are external, such as war, or internal, such as famine. Accordingly, whoever decides must have deliberated, and to deliberate means choosing among options. At the minimum, good judgment would mean choosing actions that lead to one's desired end. At the highest level of practical judgment, this would mean choosing good actions and good ends; that is, for the classical philosophers, choices have a moral dimension.

If the political art is really an art of choosing and determining what is choice-worthy, those who rule should be those who are most able to make these choices and determinations⁵. Even in our own representative democracy, we want the President or legislators to be familiar with "the issues," to have weighed and measured the evidence and arguments, and to arrive at a conclusion based on their deliberations. The common criticism that a politician decides based on polls is an indication that we do not expect our representatives to suspend their own judgment and become mere mouthpieces for their constituency.

In the *Republic*, Socrates presents the healthy city – what Glaucon calls the city of pigs – as the self-sufficient, small city that has no need of war or a guardian

³ Cf Plato, *Republic*, 426-435

⁴ Cf *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1141b20-30

⁵ Aristotle, in fragments of the *Protrepticus*, points out that determining what *should* be is the object of philosophy.

class⁶. The healthy city requires only what is necessary to sustain life; as such, once it is brought into being it does not require any particular intelligence to guide it or preserve it. It is enough, as in simpler animals, that the individuals comprising the city perform the duties to which they are suited and that contribute to the whole. The city that has relish, or the feverish city, must become more complicated. Its increased appetite puts it in conflict with other cities and also introduces arts that appeal to the senses⁷, so that it becomes possible for the city to argue with itself. Thus Socrates makes the double entendre – the city now has need of swineherds where it did not before; that is, it needs a rational component to order the city. A further implication of this remark is that the general character of the people has not changed: pigs are not made into human beings by refining their tastes. If the city is to be more than a city of pigs one must go beyond arts and luxuries to find what, in actuality, makes us human as opposed to any other animal.

We as moderns recognize the necessity of government by the rejection of *laissez faire* markets and institutions; competing interests require regulation and ordering to maintain the social and political order. The person in the best position to make these determinations seems to be someone who is best able to understand the particulars of the things being regulated and relate that understanding to the whole of the political community. That is, we should not expect bankers to regulate banking, even though they possess the art of banking. Nor should we expect someone ignorant of banking to make those determinations, because the art exists in service to the

⁶ *Republic*, 369b-372d

⁷ *Republic*, 373b-e

whole, and only by knowing the art and what it is capable of can it be made of use. Rarely, however, are the most intelligent people elected. Our system encourages the most intelligent people to go into lucrative professions; at best, they become consulting experts to those who make the final decisions. Our politicians are experts in the formal political process; they do not generally have in-depth understanding of the technical topics about which they legislate or make policy. Instead, consulting outside technical experts is accepted as a necessary aspect of modern rule.

It would be impossible to do away with technical experts, of course, but it is possible to accept advice intelligently. Therefore, I take Plato's suggestion seriously that the best minds available are those fittest to rule. We have a tool to assist us in finding those minds: the IQ test.

The Politics of IQ

The concept of innate intelligence and Intelligence Quotient (IQ) testing is incredibly divisive. Most of us are willing to casually admit that a person is "smart." We will admit to ourselves or intimates that someone else is "slow." These are practical determinations that one commonly makes either in a consciously theory agnostic way, or simply without thinking through the meaning behind the speech. It is once we start to question why the first person is smart and the second person slow that we get into trouble. Many people will argue that differences in intelligence are largely environmental, that IQ tests are meaningless, and that even if they do measure something, it is quite different from what we generally mean when we say someone is intelligent. These points may have merit, but resistance of this kind may also be the

result of a misunderstood fealty to liberal values generally and a strong need to protect one's own self-image in particular.

Regardless of any cultural or personal resistance to the concept of intelligence, it is important. Our world is becoming more complex, and the political problems we face reflect not only growing scientific sophistication, but also the accretion of two hundred years of legislation and bureaucracy. Our culture, too, has become more cognitively complex. It is more pressing than ever to embrace a philosophic view of the whole of our political life; that is to say, to embrace “knowledge with its head on.”⁸ Rather than acquiring more experts or members of the academy, what is needed are great expectations for those in office – an expectation that they be the best in the way that the classical philosophers understood it. A return to this view requires understanding how we view intelligence now and honestly assessing whether the classical philosophers can teach us something we have forgotten.

The contemporary view of intelligence has largely been from the perspective of economic, scientific, and engineering success, and the kind of intelligence we fund in our educational programs is largely of this sort. This focus on instrumental intelligence makes it pervasive; our economy has been transformed by the rapid progress of science and technology over the past century. What makes it economically valuable also seems to make it morally monstrous: instrumental intelligence pretends to be value-free and answers any question posed to it, no matter how inhuman. This indifference to values subsumes intelligence under present-day

⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1141a19-20. All quotations from the *Nicomachean Ethics* are taken from Joe Sachs' translation (Focus, 2002).

political science while alienating it from politics itself. To become political, intelligence must become philosophical. It is my hope that we can redeem the concept of intelligence; not merely in the context of intelligence testing per se, but in terms of recognizing that the problem of intelligence is closely related to the problem of ruling.

The question of intelligence is not merely a theoretical one; it is relevant far beyond the building of cities in speech. The importance we ascribe to measures of intelligence informs a broad range of policy questions and could challenge our democratic processes. If, as Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray report in *The Bell Curve*, low intelligence is highly correlated with every sort of social evil - crime, disability, high birth rates, and poverty, to name a few - should our political and social institutions take cognitive differences into account and thereby attempt to make life better for all members of society? The issue is a deeply personal one. After all, what could be more intimate than the capabilities of one's own mind? Contemporary arguments about intelligence that proceed into the policy domain are bound to be met with resistance.

To what extent should we accept measures of intelligence as conveying real information? If they do have basis in reality, what do these measures tell us, if anything, about social roles for those who are exceptionally intelligent? These questions may be uncomfortable, and perhaps they should be. Part of my argument, however, is that Western political philosophy has always been concerned with this problem, in one form or another, but that it has almost always been hidden from view. The backlash against racial pseudoscience after the Holocaust is only one of the most

recent forces that push the subject into the realm of taboo. The controversy surrounding Herrnstein and Murray's book - due to a thirty page chapter of a five hundred page book discussing differences in average IQ between races and supported by empirical evidence - is further evidence that some topics are considered beyond discussion.

Classical political philosophy acknowledged differences between individuals, and took the problem of finding a place for exceptional individuals quite seriously. Plato's arguments are highly linked to contemporary arguments about IQ, and by understanding Plato's arguments in greater detail we may find a more palatable way to approach the issue. Of course, any attempt to impose contemporary concepts onto classical philosophical systems is apt to arouse suspicion, and rightly so⁹. Finding the new in the old carries with it the inclination to distort or misrepresent, and the inclination is more severe the further one is from one's interpreted material. With that in mind, the concept of IQ is a modern one, born in the 19th century and representing a kind of mathematical thought that was alien to Plato and Friedrich Nietzsche alike. The Intelligence Quotient is, however, merely a contemporary means of representing a concept with which all thinking people have dealt throughout time: some people are able to think better than others.

⁹ As Montesquieu wrote, "To carry back to distant centuries the ideas of the century in which one lives is of all sources of error the most fertile. To those people who want to render all the earlier centuries modern, I shall say what the priests of Egypt said to Solon: "O Athenians, you are nothing but children!"'" *Spirit of the Laws*, Part 6, Ch. 14, from Anne Cohler et al's translation (Cambridge, 1989).

The classical philosophers, with their focus on virtue, certainly understood that individuals vary in capacity. Whether through divine inspiration or nature, some individuals consistently excel. Political philosophy has not only considered, but has been shaped by the realization that people have differing levels of intelligence. From Plato's *Republic* onward, what to do with the best thinkers has influenced political philosophy fundamentally.

Rather than representing a radical departure from existing thought on intelligence, the concept of IQ is the result of a continual honing of a philosophical tradition surrounding intelligence that culminated in the creation of a statistical method of measuring cognitive abilities. I argue that psychoanalysis provides a new way of looking at the opposition between the rational and irrational aspects of human thought, and that this perspective has important consequences for any political philosophy that seeks to take into account intellectual difference. Further, this perspective is symptomatic of a loss of the Platonic insight that philosophical inquiry - as opposed to scientific or intellectual inquiry - should always keep in mind its own limits.

Meritocracy

The most thorough contemporary exploration of intelligent rule is Michael Young's *The Rise of the Meritocracy*. Young's vision is clearly a dystopian satire, but he contends:

The book was, in other words, intended to present two sides of the case – the case against as well as the case for a meritocracy. It is not a simple matter and was not intended to be. The two points of view are contrasted throughout. The imaginary author has a shadow. The

decision, one way or another, was, and is left to the reader, the hope being that, on the way to making up his or her mind on one of the great issues of modern society, he or she will also have a little fun.¹⁰

The difficulty is that by presenting both sides of the case, it is nearly impossible to discern which arguments Young takes seriously in meritocracy's favor. For Young, hope has a powerful political importance, and he is concerned that a science that eliminates hope in favor of determinism ultimately extinguishes the fire of protest¹¹. Reducing one another to scientifically determined positions on a hierarchy of human merit, it would seem, divests us of the pretense of equality that is necessary to defend our interests.

Young's analysis is ultimately the victim of his style. Because he is compelled to show the dark side of the meritocracy, he does not attempt to explore what the best version of it might look like. His hypothesized state must be ordered in such a way that it has flaws as well as benefits. The reader is left to determine whether the arguments against meritocracy are against meritocracy itself, or this particular dystopian vision.

For Young, the meritocracy is driven by the discovery that merit equals intelligence plus effort ($I+E=M$)¹². But this formula, despite being the basis of the society's merit system, is not explained further. Young does not say whether the formula is prescriptive or descriptive, nor does he question whether merit measurements under this system comport with our ideas of what merit means. This absence is all the more telling when he declares that "we have come close to realizing

¹⁰ Michael Young, *The Rise of the Meritocracy*, pg. xvii

¹¹ *Ibid*, pg. xvi

¹² *Ibid*, pg. 84

at one stroke the ideal of Plato¹³.” Young’s imagined regime gives the highest place to value-free science and therefore finds itself incapable of justifying itself in terms of values, revealing the comparison to Plato’s *Republic* as absurd¹⁴. It is, in fact, a society that has made man serve science instead of the other way around¹⁵.

The meritocracy, for Young, is not only a conspicuous ruling class, but a broad group of bureaucrats, business leaders, and scientists, so that the particular influence of individuals in the class cannot be addressed as part of the political process. The question Young poses – whether meritocracy is ultimately good or bad – must be addressed by first asking whether a good meritocracy can be constructed. I attempt to provide a step toward answering that question.

General Outline of the Dissertation

This chapter has introduced the problem of intelligence as it pertains to political rule, and stressed the importance of political philosophy as an answer to that problem. Plato and Aristotle, in addition to being geniuses in their own right, understood the problem of intelligence and provide a framework for its political expression.

The second chapter will go into more detail about how Plato and Aristotle approached the subject of intelligence and rule by philosophers. Plato, especially, recognized the difficulties of philosophical rule; I consider the guardians Plato’s

¹³ *Ibid*, pg. 93

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 145-146

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 151

Socrates put forth in the *Republic*, and compare the philosopher kings to teachings from the *Laws*, *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, *Statesman*, and *Meno*. This chapter seeks to ascertain the role of intelligence in philosophy and rule, and the kind of education that Plato believed would be necessary for capable individuals. Alfarabi's commentaries provide additional context for the discussion. The second chapter provides a basis from which I compare contemporary theories of intelligence with political philosophy, and allows me to draw comparisons and outline the differences between these views. Chapter two also considers the relationship between law and intelligence. The political philosopher teaches legislators, who in turn teach statesmen, and statesmen teach citizens. A law that is comprehensive is impossible, but statesmen without a framework are tyrants. The second chapter considers these tensions to try to gain a fuller understanding of how intelligence is actually used in classical political philosophy.

The third chapter concentrates on the Machiavellian dyad of prince and adviser. Machiavelli makes intelligence – often in the guise of prudence – the most important feature of any lasting state. As Leo Strauss says, rule by gentlemen is meant to be open rule¹⁶, but rule for Machiavelli is always hidden. Hidden rule seems to be necessary for many reasons, but foremost among them is the seeming impossibility of intelligence and power coinciding. Machiavelli is not satisfied with a political philosophy that allows for the philosopher to exist outside of the city; he

¹⁶ Leo Strauss, *An Introduction to Political Philosophy*, pg. 327

disclaims the possibility that high ability will be left alone¹⁷. Chapter three will examine this adviser from the perspective of political action in the *Prince* and *Discourses*, but will also carefully consider the argument Machiavelli puts forward in his *Clizia* and *Mandragola*. Though these plays are intended for a lower audience than his political works, they freely show the young body with an old head, providing clarification to his political arguments.

The fourth chapter focuses on the early development of IQ tests, beginning with Sir Francis Galton. Chapter four is concerned with understanding not only the scientific insights that led to our contemporary systems of intelligence testing, but the underlying ideologies and racial ideas that informed many of the discussions up until only recently. Many of the biases in interpreting results can be traced back to Galton as one of the earliest scientific, mathematically based proponents of intelligence testing and eugenics. The fourth chapter engages critics of intelligence testing, such as Stephen J. Gould and Malcolm Gladwell, examining arguments against the scientific validity of intelligence tests as a unitary measurement of intelligence. Chapter four attempts to integrate the psychometric account with Freudian psychoanalytic theory and group psychology. The psychoanalytic account casts some doubt on any politics that places too much weight on intelligence, and emphatically points out the deficiencies of scientific thought and the irrational nature of our impulses. The fourth chapter sets forth certain limits around our expectations for

¹⁷ Machiavelli, *Discourses*, III 2

intelligent rule, while still providing conditions under which rational group processes can occur.

Chapter five concludes the dissertation by bringing the focus to American democracy and contemporary views of intelligence. I rely on Richard Hofstadter's *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* as an examination of how intellectuals are perceived in the United States. I also identify differences between the intellectual as Hofstadter conceives him and the intelligent human being informed by philosophy that I put forward as a potential solution. I argue that we make use of our brightest minds in a shortsighted way, and suggest some tentative prescriptions for making intelligent rule possible and allowing it to be guided by philosophy, if not philosophical itself.

The idea of human intelligence has probably existed since our earliest ancestors, and intellectual interest in it has endured for over two thousand years. Rather than focusing on a single understanding of intelligence from a particular thinker, I aim to show an outline of its relation to political philosophy over time. As such, my approach is broad in scope, covering the classical philosophers, Machiavelli's modern influence, modern psychology and psychometrics, psychoanalysis, and contemporary American views of intelligence. I hope to provide some indications, guidance, and justifications for bringing a classical view to bear on the modern problem of identifying and fostering intelligent rule.

Chapter 2: Classical Philosophy and Intelligence

This chapter will introduce the role of intelligence in classical political philosophy. To do so, I will first briefly address Plato's images of the soul, and examine the relationship between thinking and memory for Plato. I will then examine Aristotle's psychology, with an emphasis on traits that make up intelligence and practical judgment. Next, I will look at the tension between intelligence and law, in terms of the defects of both law and direct rule generally. I then look to the *Meno* for a preliminary Platonic investigation of the innate differences between human beings, which leads into a discussion of the role of the philosopher as guardian in the *Republic*.

Investigating the role of intelligence in Plato and Aristotle presents numerous difficulties, not the least of which is terminology. While in ordinary speech we are at least dimly aware of the difference between, for example, wisdom and intelligence, there is a limit to what psychometricians can measure. Psychologists talk about mind – or executive function, working memory, g ¹⁸, and so on – the classical philosophers talk about a soul with intellect, practical judgment, cognition, and other aspects. Modern psychologists are generally uninterested in looking back to classical philosophy to understand human nature. To the extent they do, it is usually in the form of a history of science, which presupposes that what we know today is better

¹⁸ The general intelligence factor, which is the hypothesized underlying trait that accounts for correlation of performance for distinct cognitive tasks.

than what we knew yesterday. From that point of view Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* or *On the Soul* are relics, objects of historical curiosity at best, and incompatible with the mental models that positivistic science assures us are the best available. This lack of continuity between the way classical philosophers described the soul and the way psychologists describe the mind means that it is all the more difficult to look back now and try to apply a modern concept – the IQ test – to a classical political philosophy that resisted relying too much on math to describe the world. There is also, therefore, no way to construct a direct mapping between Plato and Aristotle's terms and our own. Even an ostensibly simple word like intellect (*nous*) becomes, in Aristotle's hands, a complex interrelationship between the things that are and the perceiving self¹⁹. But a direct mapping need not be found; we should treat Plato and Aristotle on their own terms before attempting to establish the relevance of their psychological theories to contemporary investigations of intelligence²⁰.

¹⁹ Aristotle's *nous* is especially difficult because of his discussion of the active and passive intellects in the *On the Soul*, 3.5, and the extensive commentary that has attached to it. See Caston's "Aristotle's two intellects: A modest proposal" for a summary of the debate and a tentative solution to the problem.

²⁰ Joe Sachs notes that Aristotle uses at least two dozen words for kinds of thinking, so that the vague word "mind" of Descartes does not correspond to anything in the Aristotelian vocabulary. See Sachs' translation of *On the Soul*, pg. 202. Modern psychologists and psychometricians do not make much use of the homogenized concept of mind, but the intermediary stage seems to have been enough to muddy the connection between ancient and contemporary terminology.

Plato and Aristotle recognized individual differences in intellectual capability²¹, understood these differences to be natural, at least to some extent, and believed that outstanding intellectual ability has important consequences for who should rule. The last stipulation is the most controversial, insofar as Socrates is taken to present his city-in-speech only to illustrate the absurdity of a city that would embrace philosophy²². It is not necessary, however, to consider the entire city-in-speech forthrightly spoken. Rather, Plato presents the immense difficulty of nurturing the best minds and natures; many of those difficulties persist even in the modern democratic state. Plato's discussion of memory (*memesis*) and recollection (*anamnesis*) offers a glimpse of the tension between natural ability and education, and the limits of what even the best education can provide. This conflict is borne out in the accounts of law and ruling in the *Laws*, *Republic*, and *Stateseman*.

²¹ Differences in intelligence were certainly known to the Greeks prior to Plato: compare the descriptions and actions of Odysseus with those of Telamonian Ajax, for example. Detienne and Vernant give an overview of cunning intelligence, or *metis*, which occupied an important role in pre-philosophic Greek culture, in *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society*. They argue that Greek philosophers abandoned that way of viewing intelligence in favor of strictly logical intelligence (pp. 2-5). *Metis* is exemplified in the octopus and fox. Though Detienne and Vernant do not venture so far forward in the future, the comparison calls Machiavelli to mind, who one might say picks up the thread.

²² Allan Bloom, *The Republic of Plato*, pp.309, 380-381

Intelligence and the Soul

Plato did not write treatises, but dialogues, and Plato's Socrates freely relies on images (or noble lies) when demonstration will not do. As such, the Platonic dialogues do not contain a consistent psychology. Unlike modern psychologists, he does not seem to be interested in reifying components of the soul, or even providing a scientific account. He presents differing teachings about the soul in the *Laws*, *Meno*, *Phaedrus*, and *Republic*²³; what is important to Plato, it seems, are the lessons one derives about human nature from the images of the soul he paints. The *Republic* posits three aspects to the soul: the appetitive, the spirited, and the rational (436a-b). The *Laws* mythically depicts the human being as a puppet pulled by hard and iron threads of the passions, and a single, soft, golden thread (644d-645d). What seems to be common to all of the accounts is that human beings have desires in conflict with reason, and even reason is in conflict with itself, so far as it is dialectical²⁴. Plato provides a variety of images through which we can see aspects of *akrasia* – action in conflict with reason. Having an orderly soul – in particular, having desires that conform to reason – seems to be the most basic form of virtue (*Republic* 443d and *Nicomachean Ethics* 1102b20-30).

²³ As well as the *Laches*, *Phaedo*, *Philebus*, *Symposium*, and *Timaeus*

²⁴ Seth Benardete, *The Being of the Beautiful*, I.115.

Thinking in the Theaetetus

If virtue is knowledge, as Socrates indicates, and if the soul must be ordered around reason, what is reason? What is thinking? Plato gives us a tantalizing image of how thinking works through two metaphors in the *Theaetetus*. In the first, Socrates describes knowledge as a wax block that receives impressions from signet rings. The properties of the wax block influence the image that is left behind. Particularly, the wax block may be too runny, or too firm, or of the perfect consistency. Importantly, Socrates identifies the wax substance as being natural to the individual; it is genetic (194C-195B). But the wax block itself is independent of intelligence or wit; he cites himself as having a “shaggy heart²⁵” (195C) or a poor memory. Socrates points out that those who are quick learners have fluid souls, and are therefore quick to forget, while those whose souls are hard are slow to learn but remember well (194E). Aristotle extends this argument by observing that those who are slow tend to have good memories, but those who are quick are better at *recollecting* (*On Memory and Recollection*, 449b4-10). The question of good and bad memories reminds us that we each have capabilities and talents, but they do not flower on their own. A naturally strong man might avoid exercise because he can apply his untrained strength well enough. The man who is naturally weak might train himself to have normal strength only with great effort. On the one hand, the man who is naturally weak, but trained, might be admired for his persistence, but he cannot be relied upon any more than a normal man who trains in the ordinary way. On the other hand, the naturally strong

²⁵ Translations of the *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, and *Statesman* are from Seth Benardete’s *The Being of the Beautiful* (University of Chicago, 2007).

man seems liable to laziness, and he could be much stronger than he is. Our habits help form our character, but we are limited not only by our weaknesses, but also, in a sense, by our strengths: “even good fortune, when it is excessive, is an impediment” (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1153b20-30).

Like the man who is naturally strong, the good memory enables a bad habit. When one relies too much on memory one skips the important work of weighing and measuring one’s opinions. Conversely, those for whom thinking is very difficult may find themselves reliant on memory. The wax-block metaphor breaks down, however: if our sense-impressions of objects are literally represented in the soul, then we should never err when answering “what is 5 and 7?” if we already know 5, 7, and 12. Our mental processes would be like rearranging pieces of the block, and the mere juxtaposition of the representations of all three numbers would be sufficient for us to reject the answer of ‘11.’ Intelligence, then, cannot be a mere rearranging of the supposed facts at our disposal. Intelligence seems to be more than merely collecting tools with which we do intellectual work. Theaetetus does not realize that his own discovery of the “surds” is a response to the examples worked out by Theodorus, but the proof itself is not in any sense a rearrangement of those examples. Knowledge requires the active use of intelligence to order experience.

Socrates abandons the wax block, and turns to a dovecote. Knowledge is now like birds: one must first seek them out, and then one must store them. But when one wishes to retrieve knowledge, one must hunt the idea birds again. The metaphor has become less like we would expect the soul to operate. But in changing the image, Socrates has pointed out the difference between mere memory and the *zetetic*, hunting

or searching effort of philosophy. The souls of the many might indeed operate much like the wax blocks, comparing what was seen before to what is seen now to establish identity. But the philosopher aims for something more, and this something more requires an active process of thinking²⁶. The dovecote thus represents the dual nature of that searching: first finding beings in the world, isolating them from the surrounding environment, and then re-finding and comparing those beings against each other to know wholes and parts. This metaphor has additional implications, when we consider that the birds also represent the transmissibility of knowledge. If finding the beings in the world requires an art of hunting, and rearranging or recollecting these beings is also a form of hunting, these are both part of the philosopher's art. But that art is not, itself, represented by a bird in the dovecote; it belongs to the philosopher *qua* philosopher, and is not directly transmissible. Perhaps it is trainable through dialectic²⁷. The requirement of such an art thus preserves the genetic distinction made with the wax block, but in less emphatic terms; the ability to think is predicated upon some natural ability that may not be teachable itself – that is, intelligence.

Underlying the argument is Theaetetus' contention that knowledge is sense perception (151E). But as Socrates points out in the *Republic*, it is when our senses give contradictory information that we are forced to begin to think (524e-525a). Theodorus' own suspect evaluation of Theaetetus' appearance thus begins the

²⁶ Glaucon summarizes the discussion of the divided line and the division of the intelligibles by saying that thought is something between opinion and intelligence (*nous*) (*Republic*, 511d).

²⁷ Cf. *Republic*, 536c-e

dialogue that is, chiefly, about teaching a promising student to think. Plato wants us to distinguish memory from thought, and thought from knowledge. The consequence of these distinctions is that teaching becomes more difficult; even under the instruction of a sophist who propounds a memory system, such as Hippias, the student is limited to the extent that he relies only on the things coming into being around him, rather than the things that are. The political art, then, cannot be learned by rote. Knowledge by itself, however, is not political; like the moral virtues, the political is relational and relative to the city in which one lives. We must turn instead to the intellectual virtues to provide a basis for the practical expression of knowledge and intelligence in a political context.

Aristotle's Psychology

Aristotle separates his discussion of virtue into two parts: virtue of character and virtue of thinking (*Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II, 1103b and Book VI, 1139a). Virtue of character is attainable by anyone through habit, because to be virtuous is different from merely acting virtuously (1105a20-1105b10). Aristotle puts forward three requirements for actually being virtuous in this way: the actions must be performed knowingly, for their own sakes, and stably. In this context “knowingly” only means that the person acting knows *what* he is doing. For example, he is not intending to commit a crime but accidentally performs what seems to be a just act. Knowledge itself is not a requirement of ethical character. Instead, it is defined in relation to feelings and actions; one must act “by a proportion and by the means by

which a person with practical judgment would determine it” (1106b10-1107a10). That is, it is not necessary for someone with virtue of character to have practical judgment himself, but to have been habituated to respond to situations in the right way through some sort of education. Aristotle points out that there is an unlimited number of ways to err, but limited ways to get something right. Our moral judgment then must be able to pick the target out accurately.

This formulation thrusts us into the political. If the person having virtuous character does not need to have practical judgment himself, then he must have been habituated by someone who had it in his stead. This much is implied by the requirement of an education from childhood (1104b10-20). The target metaphor draws our attention to another issue surrounding ethical virtue; it requires a stable world, hence a stable regime. Because ethical virtue is relative to the circumstances of the feelings and actions, it is easier to be virtuous to the extent that one avoids novel situations. As we see generally in the Plato’s *Laws* and *Republic*, the city should be constructed such that its activities are predictable and do not challenge the citizens to apply virtue in novel ways. Virtue of character is simply too important to political life to trust its coming into being on widespread possession of such a scarce resource as human intelligence. Alfarabi suggests that political science consists of “knowing the things by which the citizens of cities attain happiness through political association in the measure that innate disposition equips each of them for it;” what remains after this is to bring theoretical virtues, deliberative virtues, moral virtues, and practical arts

into actual being in the city.²⁸ The city by itself is unable to be happy unless it is ordered by someone who knows.

The natural objection is that cities are not so ordered, and life not so predictable, but we do not therefore assert that virtue is impossible. How could a habituation contingent upon practical judgment come about? Aristotle addresses this by pointing out that the undemonstrated opinions of the old and experienced give the appearance of practical judgment (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1143b10-20). If the city is ordered by good laws, it provides the kind of stability that is necessary to form experience by hindsight. A person does not need to know that light meats produce health if he knows that chicken is light and healthful (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1041b10-30); it is even possible for a person to give beautiful care to another single human being by precise observation and experience (1180b10-20). The knowledge of particulars is sufficient so long as circumstances do not change. If chickens were to die out, the person without knowledge of both the universal case (that light meats are healthful) and the particulars (which other kinds of animals have light meat) would be unable to make a good decision unless by chance.

It is only the person who has perfected intellectual virtue, and therefore practical judgment, who would be able to adjust to an unstable or chaotic world and still make good choices. Since the political world, as opposed to the natural world, does not seem to present itself as orderly from the outset, but is a product of human art, it requires an artisan who can craft it in such a way that citizens are able to attain

²⁸ Alfarabi, *Attainment of Happiness*, paragraphs 1 and 20-22. The translation is taken from Mushin Mahdi's *Alfarabi: Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle* (Agora, 2001).

ethical virtue in the absence of practical judgment of their own. This argument further implies that a legislator is insufficient, because circumstances both within and outside of the city are variable and must be addressed as time goes on. It is for this reason that philosophers are required if citizens are to remain virtuous over time. Ethical virtue is wholly dependent, then, on being ordered by intellectual virtue; Aristotle finds the intellectual virtues so important that he spends an entire book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* discussing them.

Possible kinds of intelligence are intellect (*nous*) and practical judgment (*phronesis*). Aristotle distinguishes the two by defining intellect as that which comes prior even to knowledge, insofar as it is a grasp on first terms that do not require demonstration. Knowledge is derived from reasoning²⁹ – either demonstratively or dialectically - about what is necessarily so, based upon what is necessary. Practical judgment, however, is directed toward the changeable things. It is a process of deliberation that culminates in action directed at the good. Despite the way we use the term “intellect” in ordinary conversation, Aristotle seems to mean something very different. This is especially apparent in the *On the Soul*, in which the active and passive intellects are discussed. It is unclear from the discussion in the *Nicomachean Ethics* whether one’s capacity for intellect, in the sense of grasping first terms, is variable between human beings. That is, are these first terms available to all of us without qualification, or does access to them require something more? Maimonides

²⁹ More broadly, however, reasoning is *logos*, or the use of speech in thinking (*dianoia*). Using speech to reason is exclusively human; while animals may communicate with sounds, or even to relay a perception, human beings alone have the ability to affirm and deny statements about the world.

describes this difference in terms of divine overflow³⁰; an especially telling example is his simile of the person who experiences continuous flashes of lightning, so that he lives in the dark night as though he were in the day³¹. Aristotle seems to imply that the intellect is the means through which we think and understand, but it is not the faculty itself (*On the Soul*, 429a10-30); the hammer is the means through which we drive a nail, but our efficiency in the task is also a matter of our accuracy and strength. In the being-at-work of driving nails, however, accuracy and strength are fruitless without the tool that brings them together and realizes the result.

For both Plato and Aristotle, the notion of the good is inseparable from their concepts of intellect or intelligence. It is with this in mind that Aristotle provides an account of the rational part of the soul. The rational is divided into knowing and calculating, or deliberating. But then we are diverted into the “three things in the soul that govern action and truth.” These things are broken down into sense-perception, intellect, and desire. Truth turns out to be the work of both of the thinking parts of the soul: intellect and desire (1139b10-30), calling to mind the chariot of the *Phaedrus*. In Chapter 3, the soul is revealed to disclose truth by five powers: art, knowledge, practical judgment, wisdom, and intellect. By the end of Book VI, the *Nicomachean Ethics* has taught us that all of the intellectual virtues are subsumed under intellect; what once appeared to be limited to the inarticulate indivisibles (*Nicomachean*

³⁰ Moses Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, see, for example, 14a, 20a, and 47a.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 4b. Also see Shlomo Pines’ interpretive essay, which puts forth the interpretation that this person is not necessarily, or only, a prophet, but may be the philosopher, pp. ci and civ-cvi.

Ethics, 1139b30-1140a1 and *Posterior Analytics*, 71b20-23) is also what allows us to see the universal in the particular³²:

And intellect is directed at what is ultimate on both sides, since it is intellect and not reason that is directed at both the first terms and the ultimate particulars, on the one side at the changeless first terms in demonstrations, and on the other side, in thinking about action, at the other sort of premise, the variable ultimate particular; for these particulars are the sources from which one discerns that for the sake of which an action is, since the universals are derived from the particulars. Hence intellect is both a beginning and an end, since the demonstrations that are derived from these particulars are also about these.

Knowledge is of things that are necessary or must necessarily be the case. It seems to be teachable and therefore learnable. Knowledge comes from conviction that is true, primary, and indivisible; it also must be better known than, prior to, and responsible for the conclusion. Knowledge is of things that are not changeable, and therefore it does not make sense to speak of deliberating over them. Still, the process of arriving at a valid conclusion from sound premises must have a name.

Aristotle first looks at the way one commonly speaks of practical judgment: by talking about people who seem to have it. They make advantageous decisions for themselves in terms of living well as a whole. Since decisions and deliberations concern things that are changeable, practical judgment is not knowledge. Nor is practical judgment art, because it is unconcerned with making things. Practical judgment is a truth-disclosing active condition involving reason that governs action, concerned with what is good and bad for a human being. There is no evidence, according to Aristotle, intellect is present in all animals, or even human beings, alike, insofar as intellect is taken in the sense of practical judgment (*On the Soul*, 404b 1-

³² *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1143a30-1143b10

10). A component of practical judgment, thoughtfulness (*gnome*) is a right discrimination of what is decent³³ and thus combines the universal and the particular³⁴. This discussion illuminates the distinction between intellect and perception, universals and particulars, and universal laws and practical judgment. That is, this way of being comprehends the good aimed at by the law while recognizing the need for exceptions in the particular, so that the application of the law serves the good³⁵.

Interestingly, Aristotle points out that in an art, it is preferable to have someone who makes an error willingly instead of unwillingly, but such is not the case with practical judgment. Here Aristotle addresses the conflict of Plato's *Lesser Hippias*. Particularly, Socrates argued that a person who has the most virtue is also the most capable of vice, comparing Odysseus and Achilles. A skilled liar is skilled because he knows what is true, and is therefore able to say something false. A person who does not know the truth is only able to guess about a lie, and might happen upon the truth by guessing. Hippias is unable to separate his moral feelings about lying from the issue of excellence or virtue; clearly, one prefers a runner who runs slowly willingly to one who runs slowly unwillingly.

But practical judgment is not like running. When someone makes an error in practical judgment, he either makes the error because it is in his advantage, or he

³³ "Decency" is Sachs' translation of *epieikeia*, which is "the attribute by which people recognize when particular circumstances call for a departure from strict justice, or from any general rules." See Sachs, *Nicomachean Ethics*, pg. 203. Other translators give this as equity, see W.D. Ross, pg. 113 and Robert C. Bartlett, pg. 129.

³⁴ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1143a10-30

³⁵ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1137b10-30

makes it to his disadvantage. If the error is in his advantage as a whole, then it is not an error – it is like lying. In that case, he has actually judged that the so-called error is more beneficial than the so-called correct judgment. If the error is in his disadvantage, and he has chosen it, then his practical judgment has failed, and therefore the error was not actually willing, for no one would willingly choose the worse result unless he thought it was in his interest. Therefore, Aristotle asserts that practical judgment is itself a virtue, because it does not have any end to aspire to other than itself. In a brief passage, Aristotle seems to remake the Socratic argument that no one does wrong knowingly into “no one does wrong who uses practical judgment,” i.e., intelligence.

Importantly, Aristotle contends that wisdom is intellect with knowledge. That is, a firm grasp of what is necessary as well as understanding the necessary things that flow from them. Since wisdom is independent of practical judgment, because it is not concerned with particulars, the juxtaposition of the two faculties raises an issue addressed in Aristophanes’ *Clouds*: philosophers are so focused on heavenly things that they can only be called wise, but seem to lack practical judgment because they do not attend to those things that appear to be in their best interests as human beings. Thales is the prototype: Aristotle cites him as one popularly known for being wise without practical judgment (1141b1-10), and Socrates gently mocks him for falling into a well while contemplating the heavens (*Theaetetus*, 174A). Yet, in the *Politics* Aristotle points out that Thales was able to establish a monopoly based upon his knowledge of astronomy – i.e., that knowledge which seems to be least applicable to

the human things (*Politics*, 1259a). This seems to suggest that intellect generally, and philosophy in particular, is applicable to the problems of ruling generally.

Aristotle distinguishes quick-wittedness (*eusunesia*) or astuteness (*sunesis*) (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1143a10-20), ingenuity (*agchinoia*) (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1142b1-10 and *Posterior Analytics*, 89b10-89b16), and cleverness (*deinotes*) (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1144a23-29) as differentiated between human beings. Astuteness relates to practical judgment and the ability to quickly understand the judgment of another – a putting together of circumstances and the relation of those circumstances to action. Ingenuity is directed to finding the middle term having observed two extremes. Cleverness is reasoning from ends to means. He goes to pains to distinguish each of these kinds of thinking from skilled deliberation (*eubolia*) and therefore from practical intelligence. These distinctions preserve the moral core of practical intelligence, while simultaneously acknowledging its dependence on faculties that are themselves amoral. The discussion allows us to understand how a person with a philosophic nature can be used for bad ends; just as food serves health when used well but detracts from health when used poorly, the calculating faculties serve practical intelligence and ultimately wisdom when they are directed to the proper ends, but are disadvantageous when they are used in isolation. This is Aristotle's criticism of what we would today call instrumental intelligence. The next piece of the argument concerns pleasure: certain people love one kind of thing more than another. They are musical people, or lovers of learning (1175a10-15), and "people who are passionately devoted to the flute are unable to pay attention to arguments if they hear someone playing a flute" (1175b1-10). These points anticipate

his final argument in book ten of the *Ethics*, because they prepare us for the idea that some human beings are better suited to lawmaking and politics than others due to innate capacity and training.

Aristotle's discussion therefore requires us to examine our own understanding of what intelligence is, and what intelligent rule might be. What we as moderns generally think of as intelligence is itself amoral, similar to astuteness, ingenuity, or cleverness. These are the kinds of qualities that modern intelligence tests assess: an ability to manipulate given information and arrive at a correct result. Aristotle suggests that this kind of lesser intelligence is the means through which one arrives at a higher kind of deliberation that considers what is good for human beings. Because not all human beings have these means, we have to rely on those who do, both to shape character and to guide lawmaking and politics.

Even though philosophers are generally regarded as "useless to the city" (*Republic*, 487d-e), practical judgment actually arises out of the general intellect, and relies upon knowledge and experience. Philosophers are, therefore, the best situated to make determinations politically and ethically, insofar as they are able to determine what is changeable, what is necessary, and the relations between them.

Intelligence and Law

The dependence of the ethical upon the intellectual suggests two ways in which the philosopher is able to contribute to the city generally: through law and direct rule. The Eleatic Stranger makes a strong case against law (*Statesman*, 294A-295B). The indictment begins from the realization that law is directed at everything

without taking into account changing circumstances. The law pretends to be a universal, or a kind of knowledge, but because it must be applied to particulars, it shows itself as lacking intelligence, “as if it were some self-willing and foolish human being who allows no one to do anything contrary to his own order or even for anyone to ask a question, not even if it turns out that, after all, something new is better for someone contrary to the speech which he himself enjoined” (*Statesman*, 294B). But knowledge ceases to be knowledge when it becomes law³⁶. This can be understood as an indictment of religious law, which derives its authority solely from age and tradition, rather than legislation as it occurs in the city. But there is a quasi-religious element to the founding of Athens, Lacedaemonia, or Rome. To the extent that the laws given by Solon, Lycurgus, Numa, or further, Moses and Mohammed, are treated as unimpeachable and immutable due to the reputations of the men themselves, the laws are deficient. Just as memory differs from the active use of knowledge expressed in practical judgment so law differs from ruling. That is, the law in ossified form loses its potency in two ways. The first is entirely practical: as circumstances change, the law may become less relevant, or cease to be beneficial. In this way, it is like the prescription given by a physician prior to his long journey – it simply cannot take into account what might occur in the physicians absence (*Statesman*, 295A-E). The second way the law loses its potency is that the lawgiver intentionally divorces the law from the intelligence that produced it. In this way, the lawgiver resembles sophists who exhort their students to memorize rather than understand.

³⁶ Benardete, *The Being of the Beautiful*, II.129

The human things are never simple, and the political is always in flux; naturally we wish for the best kinds of rulers. But human beings who have even the capacity to be the best rulers are rare; so rare, in fact, that we should not even expect fifty men out of a thousand to be top-notch draughts players in comparison with the rest of the Greeks (*Statesman*, 292E). In the same way Socrates persuaded Alcibiades to refrain from addressing the Athenian assembly, Young Socrates is forced to acknowledge that a statesman competes not only with his own people, but with all the kings of the world (*Alcibiades I*, 122d-124b). Socrates made this point to Alcibiades in material terms that were suitable to him; but his point seems to have been that the polis does not exist in a vacuum. The world around the city represents an existential threat. It is the legislator's responsibility to take into account the nature of neighboring cities, and what practices or training is necessary in relation to them (*Politics*, 1325a10-20).

This is a perspective that we as moderns seem to lack: Plato leaves open the possibility of an objective standard by which we might measure the best statesmen relative to one another. It is this objective standard that Plato appeals to in his selection of the guardians and which calls into question the claims of democracy. The images Plato uses with Theaetetus and Alcibiades are too simple, however. The highest performing draughts players are immediately visible to anyone with eyes to see, just as the best performing runners are evident by crossing the finish line³⁷. But as the allegory of the cave shows in the *Republic*, those in the dark are not in a

³⁷ Cf. *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1099a1-10

position to evaluate those who are in the light. The standard is objective, but not readily understood or accepted by those who have an interest in another outcome. In this sense, the adoption of objective standards, such as intelligence tests that are administered outside of the political process itself, would become necessary to identify promising people and give them the tools to be the best statesmen.

By pointing out the rigidity of law and the high qualifications one expects of rulers, the Eleatic Stranger heightens the tension of the argument; it is surely impossible, no matter how capable the king, for him to stand beside each person and tell him what is best (*Statesman*, 295a-b). On the one hand, a ruler so perfect would have to have knowledge of the whole. On the other, if such knowledge were available to us, we could codify the law in such a way as to take into account all possible changes of circumstance. The *Laws*, too, is designed to showcase the tension between intelligence and law. As a creative and integrative power, intelligence molds and shapes the law. Like a statue, however, law is capable of providing only a limited, ossified image of intelligence at a particular time, and for particular circumstances. The *Laws*, then, shows Socrates (as the Athenian Stranger) to be the true heir to Daedalus³⁸, breathing life into his statue and practicing a kind of phantastics (*Sophist*, 236C-E)³⁹. The laws become an automaton, and life is breathed into it as a limited form of philosophy is integrated.

³⁸ Cf *Meno*, 97D

³⁹ Cf *Bernadete*, *The Being of the Beautiful*, II.83, “Knowledge seems compelled, as the stranger presents it, to distort political things in order to grasp them.”

The *Laws* is the narrative (and image) of a founding in actuality, rather than speech. It occurs on a day long voyage to the cave of Zeus. This progression serves to tie the dialogue metaphorically to the allegory of the cave in the *Republic* while providing a link to the foundation of human law after the age of Kronos. This dual link evinces a core theme of the dialogue: the necessity of human intelligence for the ordering of social and political life. Under Kronos, humanity was essentially like cattle⁴⁰, and had no need of art or knowledge. When we see humanity after it has been decimated by cataclysm, those isolated individuals who escape death and come together after the waters have receded are happy to be in one another's company, according to the Athenian Stranger. But governing becomes necessary as human relationships become more complex, and as proximity creates conflicts. In this sense, Kleinias is right when he claims that the law is created with an eye to war, man against man and "each in private an enemy of himself" (*Laws*, 626E). The Athenian Stranger refutes Kleinias, arguing that laws are given for the sake of peace, not war; but the king or legislator's eye is still fixed on the dangers of war. His eye is on prevention, not on victory.

In the *Laws* the statesman or legislator has already been chosen, and is therefore a given. It is the laws themselves that are susceptible to deliberation. The opposite situation obtains in the *Statesman*; the legislator is a historical figment, and one must infer from the laws to the legislator. Plato thereby shows us two ways of intelligently approaching the law: creatively from what might be, or creatively from

⁴⁰ Cf *Statesman*, 271E

what might have been. In the *Phaedrus*, Phaedrus inquires of Socrates as to whether the spot they have chosen is the same one from which Boreas was said to have seized Oreithuia from the Ilissus. Socrates provides a natural explanation for the myth – namely that Oreithuia was pushed by the wind, and thus was said to have been snatched up by Boreas. But even this explanation relies on the assumption that there ever was an Oreithuia, and is therefore itself mythological. The sense, therefore, is that explanations are meant to persuade. But what good is persuasion to a tradition populated with Centaurs, Chimaera, Gorgons, and Pegasus? Such retellings belong to over-clever, laborious, and unfortunate people. Who else but philosophers reluctant to rule? Much as Socrates retells one myth with another (*Phaedrus*, 229A-229E), so the legislator who comes upon an existent regime must recreate the mythology of the people he legislates for.

The defective nature of law requires the statesman or legislator to produce something akin to naturalistic explanations – likely stories – of what has gone before. This work preserves the content of the laws and, in fact, saves them from rational investigation. A legislator should set up guards grounded in prudence and true opinion, which intelligence will knit together (*Laws*, 632C). But even from the beginning, laws are defective. They are defective because they rely on a changing world that cannot be predicted far in advance, and because they must depend on human beings for their execution. Yet laws need to be seen as timeless and sacred if they are to have a chance of adequately leading the souls of those they govern. This tension calls to mind the difference between nature (*phusis*) and law or convention (*nomoi*): human law is less arbitrary the more it conforms to human nature. Changing

laws to suit conditions is necessary, but also makes their conventionality obvious. Since not all human beings are thoughtful, laws must have more of the appearance of nature than convention, or else human beings will disregard the law. Legislators are obliged to use intelligence to teach statesmen, who must use their own intelligence to prove the integrity of the law while maintaining the state.

The Athenian Stranger, it seems, needs to be foreign. For it is only from the vantage point of an outsider that one can safely examine the arbitrary nature of the traditional law. Such a vantage needs a philosophical outlook. This is because, as human beings, we have a tendency to view everything in terms of our own individual advantage. It appears everyone thinks they know how to rule (or “use a fine thing”), but what they really mean is to use it in accordance with their own desires (*Laws*, 686E-687C). Practical judgment, or intelligence rightly understood, is therefore necessary if we are to see to the happiness of the city, and not some one individual.

Intelligence and the *Meno*

The question of whether natural differences between individuals form the basis for rational thought is complicated by the Socratic concept of anamnesis, or recollection. The hereditarian view of intelligence suggests that human beings have varying facility for thought and understanding, and that this facility is passed on genetically from parents to children. The notion of recollecting information from an otherworldly experience is, of course, entirely alien to modern science. If anamnesis, as it is presented in the *Meno*, is taken seriously, then identifying children who are

best fit to rule would be absurd; the doctrine would suggest that one could provide the environment for each child to recollect and perfect the intellectual virtues.

The *Meno* begins with a question: “Can you tell me, Socrates, whether virtue is something teachable? Or is it not teachable, but something that comes from practice (*askēton*)? Or is it something neither from practice nor from learning, but something that comes to human beings by nature, or some other way?⁴¹” Meno identifies three possible origins of virtue: teaching, practice, and nature, all of which he considers mutually exclusive⁴². The abruptness of the question underscores its fundamental importance to the Socratic enterprise itself. The fact that Meno formulates the question, as opposed to Socrates, should also suggest to us that he has erred in assuming that the possible origins of virtue are mutually exclusive.

If virtue were revealed to be teachable and learnable, but independent of practice and nature, it would be an upheaval of all politics. Consider Socrates’ city in speech in the *Republic*; guardians are chosen based upon what is taken to be their potential (*Republic*, Book III, 413C-D). It is possible that the real noble lie is not that of gold, silver, and bronze, but that there are any real differences between human beings other than those caused by obvious physical defect and differences in education. A myth of being well-born is certainly pleasing to the ears of an Adeimantus or Glaucon as Athenian gentlemen, because they are readier to accept

⁴¹ Quotations from the *Meno* are taken from the George Anastaplo and Laurence Berns translation (Focus, 1998).

⁴² Compare with *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1179b20-30, which holds that some people think a person becomes *good* by nature, habit (*ethos*), or teaching, all as mutually exclusive options.

that they are aristocrats by nature rather than birth. That such a myth is pleasing to Socrates' interlocutors makes it suspect precisely in its pleasing aspects. Many moderns would readily argue that excellence is much more, or entirely, the product of environment, opportunity, and education rather than latent gifts. But revealing that excellence has no genetic basis would undermine the justice of Socrates' city. Justice requires that the most promising are chosen and raised accordingly. If philosophy is truly the best way of life, then arbitrarily picking some children to philosophize and others to support the city through labor represents the height of injustice: it would be the selection of a slave class by lot.

Meno's question clearly presupposes that virtue exists. He does not ask Socrates whether there is such a thing as virtue, nor does he assume the Protagorean position that man is the measure of all things⁴³. After all, it seems apparent that some people stand out from others (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1140b1-20). But if virtue is transmitted solely through teaching, would not a virtuous person teach as many as possible how to be virtuous, for his sake and theirs? This is the problem that Socrates hints at later in the dialogue when discussing the sons of Pericles and Thucydides (*Meno*, 94A-94E). If virtue is teachable, and Pericles is virtuous, would he not ensure that his sons were educated in virtue? By extension, would a just, moderate,

⁴³ Aristotle affirms the radical relativism of the Protagorean maxim, *Metaphysics*, 1007b20-30. Aristotle points out that "those who repeat the saying of Protagoras" mean that "contradictory things are all true of the same thing at the same time;" which leaves open the possibility that Protagoras either meant something else or did not fully believe his own aphorism, i.e., that only "those who repeat" the saying actually mean what it implies. Protagoras does not assume the same stance with regard to virtue in Plato's *Protagoras*, however; virtue appears to be something discoverable and teachable to Protagoras, rather than a matter of anyone's opinion.

courageous, and wise person not do his utmost to ensure that virtue was widespread? Clearly, if everyone were virtuous, it would be to the benefit of all. To demand money for such an education seems particularly base. So the first alternative calls into question the possibility of virtue at all, even if Meno seems to be unaware of the implication.

What does Meno intend by asking after practicing? Clearly, he does not mean habit (*ēthos*), or at least, not with the same conditions Aristotle places on habituated virtue. Meno's imprecision makes us wonder; how is practice different from teaching and learning? One becomes excellent at playing the lyre or wrestling through practice, after all, but the practice is facilitated by a teacher. In contrast, virtue would have to be something that one already knows how to do, but must exercise to perfect. The term *askēton* refers to athletic training, but seems to imply something like mindless repetition⁴⁴. Like strength (72E), virtue would be present in everyone to some degree, but in need of exercise. This formulation contains within it many of the same problems of justice as the previous. After all, if virtue is naturally present in all, but only some undergo the appropriate gymnastic to develop it fully, what accounts for the differences between individuals? Is not the patience or inclination to practice itself a part of virtue⁴⁵? The suggestion of practice as the origin of virtue is probably the argument that Aristotle summarizes as "by performing just actions one becomes a

⁴⁴ Kevin Robb, "Asebeia and Sunousia: The issues behind the indictment of Socrates," Note 15

⁴⁵ Cf *Alcibiades I*, 106E; Alcibiades was unwilling to learn the aulos. Socrates brings this up as a prelude to a discussion of Alcibiades' impatience to enter politics despite a lack of specific education.

just person, and by performing temperate actions one becomes a temperate person” (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1105b1-20). But while this argument is “well said,” it isn’t entirely correct, insofar as virtue requires a particular way of being (1105a20-1105b). Further, Aristotle’s argument is directed toward the virtues of character rather than those of the intellect.

If virtue is entirely natural, however, we should wonder at why education is important at all. As Socrates says, we should merely be content to identify the exceptional youth and set them up in the Acropolis away from corrupting influence (*Meno*, 89B). Even this formulation, however, raises the question of how natural goodness can be corrupted if virtue, and by implication vice, is not teachable. It hints again at the implication made in the *Lesser Hippias* that those most capable of virtue are the same ones most capable of vice. Education, then, would be teaching in a limited sense: instilling the zeal for searching that characterizes philosophy, which leads to the possibility of knowledge and the attainment of virtue.

Any answer that Socrates gives to Meno is suspect. When giving an account of figure, Socrates gives a first definition to Meno, but must elaborate because a conversation between friends should take into account the premises that would be familiar to the other person (75D-E). The teaching must fit the student, so already we have entered the territory of likely stories. Plato’s Socrates is willing to leave his interlocutors with an image that is less than the full truth if that image serves the good. Platonic dialogues are designed to stimulate the reader to think, not merely to absorb a doctrine. As such, what is presented to the interlocutors cannot be taken at face value in the way modern treatises often are.

Meno's memory for prepared speeches is very good; perhaps too good⁴⁶. Much as Theaetetus seemed to summon the arguments of Parmenides, many Socratic interlocutors pass off memory for knowledge. Sometimes the source is common opinion, or law, or the opinion of a sophist. But the juxtaposition of rote memorization with the searching mode of Socrates' dialectic demonstrates that it is genuine thinking that leads to knowledge. Memory is the enemy, to the extent that it forms the boundary of our intellectual horizons and limits further inquiry. Despite Socrates telling Meno that he is "not a very good rememberer," he tells Hippias that he "pays attention to what people say." In maintaining proper attribution of the speech in addition to the argument itself, thinking is saved from being conflated with memory.

The distinction is critical, because it sets a limit on what education can provide, and the kinds of education that can be considered as such. While the student of philosophy should have a good memory, learning cannot be like a wax block on which symbols are merely rearranged to suit the occasion. It is fitting, then, that Meno questions the possibility of learning at all (80D). For while Meno is able to memorize, he seems entirely incapable of the seeking that must accompany knowledge as opposed to opinion. Plato's emphasis on the seeking or zetetic nature of philosophy anticipates modern distinctions between memory and intelligence. More than that, however, it tells us the kind of qualities that are necessary to be virtuous even within the definition of virtue Meno first provides: to be capable of ruling men.

⁴⁶ Jacob Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's Meno*, pg. 72

Meno is apparently deficient is a leader⁴⁷ for precisely this reason: he is incapable of exercising his own intelligence and relies on that of opinion.

The sort of education that Meno has received should be contrasted with the mathematical education of Theaetetus. Those skilled in calculation, Socrates told Glaucon, are naturally quick in all studies (*Republic*: 526b). Socrates seems to imply that the quickness is on account of the mathematical education, rather than an inherent quality. Just as we, as moderns, often rely on education as a proxy for intelligence, so did ancient Greeks rely on certain proxies, such as rhetorical skill. A sign of this is the way many young Greeks sought out sophists based upon their skill in arguing. Socrates does not diminish the role of natural intelligence by his comment, but in effect suggests that there are better, more objective ways to evaluate the young. Theaetetus has demonstrated to us that he has acquired knowledge independent of his teacher.

As Jacob Klein points out⁴⁸, Meno appears to follow a strategy attributed to Gorgias by Aristotle (*Sophistical Refutations*, 183b15-184a9), in which the teachers of rhetoric had students memorize questions and answers that seemed to cover the arguments for both sides of a question. Students, says Aristotle, are treated like a man with a pain in the foot. Rather than teach them an art of shoemaking, they are instead provided a variety of footwear such that their pains are addressed. One wonders if the distinction might be overwrought. Isn't the purpose of memory and of learning to have set approaches to certain problems, without having to seek the answer anew?

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 71-72

But ruling, as any suitably complex and changeable human endeavor, is subject to deliberation. It is this very deliberation that Meno avoids in his careless, memory-based approach to argumentation.

Meno's doubts about learning inspire Socrates to tell the myth of anamnesis; his account relies on the testimony of priests, priestesses, and poets. Importantly, Socrates points out that to believe with Meno would "make us lazy and is pleasant only for fainthearted people to hear, but the other argument makes us both ready to work and to seek" (81D-81E). This qualification hints to us that the myth is provisional. Even if we take anamnesis seriously as a Platonic doctrine, Plato contradicts the completeness of the knowledge acquired after death. Particularly in the *Phaedrus*, souls are differently disposed to see the truth of underlying reality (*Phaedrus*, 247E-248E). The *Meno*, however, has it that "the soul is immortal and has been born many times and has seen all things both here and in the house of Hades, there is nothing it hasn't learned" (*Meno*, 81C-D). For the purposes of the *Meno*, every soul has learned everything. Meno does not notice that this argument is circular: Socrates substitutes "seeing" for learning, and then changes the terms at the end.

Socrates further emphasizes this egalitarian view by choosing the slave boy for his demonstration. The demonstration, while convincing to Meno, should not convince us. Socrates uses leading words to make the slave boy answer, and in fact leads him into error twice before ultimately arriving at the correct solution. A more reflective man than Meno might have been struck by the injustice of keeping a slave who is capable of rational understanding. Meno's failure as a leader and as an

interlocutor emphasize the important role that human thinking plays in leadership, and pairing his deficiencies with the image of recollection shows how little Meno has developed his natural capacity: even a slave seems better suited to the task of thinking a problem through.

Our own system of primary and secondary education is also called into question, to the extent it relies on rote memory. That is not to say that the youngest students should be debating politics, nor that they should not use their memories, but that they should be exercising their critical faculties. To preserve human intelligence, we must have a system of education that provokes students to use it, especially for those who would be our future statesmen. Otherwise, they are limited to talking points and the opinions of experts, having only opinion and not knowledge.

Intelligence and the *Republic*

The true philosopher, according to Socrates, is a friend to the virtues. By nature, he is a good learner, has a good memory, and is magnificent and charming (*Republic*, 487A). But Adeimantus objects: wouldn't the many say that those who pursue philosophy end up entirely vicious, or at least useless to cities? The first case turns out to be split in two, as the many are incapable of distinguishing between those who pretend to be philosophers and those who are philosophers by nature. As such, these degraded examples must be either those who have had their natures corrupted, or those who have assumed the trappings of philosophy without the substance.

The nature of the philosopher is such that he is only born rarely among human beings (*Republic*, 491A-B). It is the very rarity of such a nature – much like gold – that imbues him with an inherent worth that is attractive to those who would make use of him. This seems to be the reason Socrates approached Alcibiades first by acknowledging the many suitors vying for Alcibiades’ affection (*Alcibiades I*, 103A-104A); high capability is useful for both good and bad ends. Socrates has called the true philosopher a “friend to the virtues;” he has not called him virtuous⁴⁹. Socrates hints that what is commonly called virtue does not deserve the high praise it receives from the many. Rather, as Alfarabi points out, the moral virtues are attainable by anyone given proper training⁵⁰. It is the intellectual virtues that are rare, and that imbue the moral virtues with meaning and seriousness (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1139a20-30). In fact, Socrates argues the virtues do not exist in the individual before they are developed, except for prudence (*Republic*, 519A), which is dangerous insofar as “the sharper it sees, the more evil it accomplishes” in a bad soul.

Plato points out that those with the most perfect natures are also the ones most susceptible to corruption; natural advantages provide greater opportunities to pursue one’s own perceived interests at the expense of the good. The comment, which forms part of a larger argument about how the philosophical character is corrupted in unjust cities, underscores the urgency of the task (*Republic*, 491C-E). Plato wants us to understand that the most capable among us also possess the most potential destructive

⁴⁹ Cf. Machiavelli, *Prince*, Ch. XXI: “A prince should also show himself a lover of the virtues, giving recognition to virtuous men, and he should honor those who are excellent in an art.”

⁵⁰ Alfarabi, *Selected Aphorisms*, 10

force. Though Socrates was tried for corrupting young men, the *Republic* wants us to understand that the real corruption - and greatest danger - comes from the kind of city that does not thoughtfully consider the differences between individuals, and only relies on these differences for purposes of personal gain.

For Plato, one of the worst dangers to the philosophical nature is to be put to non-philosophical use. This realization is all the more remarkable when we look at the highly instrumental way in which we approach primary and secondary education even today, largely in terms of practical outcome rather than theoretical inquiry. Even when the lessons themselves are theoretical, education is justified in terms of economic gain rather than intrinsic worth. Despite the fact that Socrates has pointed out the benefits of education to soul, Glaucon still seems to insist upon justifying the usefulness of education in practical terms (*Republic*, 527D-E). The contrast between the two educational objectives brings to mind the difference between Ibn Tufayl's *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan* and Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*: in the former, a life of solitude yields a journey to philosophy; in the latter, the development of technological knowledge to master nature⁵¹.

Plato is concerned that there is a hierarchy among rational beings. Socrates argued "each of us is naturally not quite like anyone else, but rather differs in his nature; different men are apt for the accomplishment of different jobs⁵²" (*Republic*, 370B). From this recognition - that the differentiation of roles in a city is both

⁵¹ Thanks to Professor Charles E. Butterworth for this comparison.

⁵² Quotations from Plato's *Republic* are taken from Allan Bloom's translation (Basic Books, 1968)

necessary for the health of the city and a consequence of the natural inequalities in individual endowments - Plato's Socrates deduces three classes of citizens. The guardians (rulers) are intended to be the most philosophic - the so-called philosopher kings of the city in speech. Plato begins the discussion of guardianship in the context of military protection, but soon he divides out a class from these who he calls the true guardians, leaving the others as auxiliaries. This ruling class is to be determined by rigorous testing of the youth of the city.

Plato's elaboration of this hierarchy seems to be largely functional, given the task of constructing a city. It is helpful to turn to Alfarabi for an elaboration of rank that is more explicit. Alfarabi begins from the observation that people depend upon one another to accomplish their tasks (*Book of Religion*, Section 13). Of course, the philosopher *qua* philosopher (or the true king, for that matter), does not need other human beings for his work in the same way the farmer needs the carpenter, blacksmith, or cowherd. His experience may be enriched by friendship and the chance to exercise the moral virtues. Alfarabi's orderly city brings to mind the importance, for Aristotle, of leisure (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1177b20-30 and *Politics*, 1337b5-20)⁵³. While the philosopher's work itself depends on no other individual, the maintenance of his body does; the extent to which the city provides for these needs is the extent of the leisure afforded to the philosopher. Alfarabi points out that while the theoretical

⁵³ Alfarabi probably did not have access to the *Politics*, but see Mushin Mahdi's *Alfarabi and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy*, pp. 34-37, for a suggestion that the absence of commentary on the *Politics* from the Islamic community was due to an attempt to protect Aristotle from religious criticism rather than a lack of access.

intellect is separate from the body, and represents the ultimate perfection, it “does not arrive at this state except by its previous need for having recourse to the bodily faculties and their actions for performing its [own] actions.”⁵⁴

Souls, then, are like the organs of a city. Each serves an overall purpose in accordance with its rank and to the benefit of the whole. The product of one organ is necessary for the continued function of another. This arrangement suggests that some souls are, by nature, directed toward the mundane more than others, so that it is even possible for loftier souls to do their work.

This is a departure from the view that the city-in-speech was crafted merely to illustrate a city in which philosophy could be tolerated. In that view, the city is constructed to protect the philosopher from charges of impiety, and it is the only arrangement in which the city could take philosophy seriously. But in Alfarabi’s elaboration, the philosopher and the city are able to come into their fullest being through their mutual existence. Socrates points out that the city must not be directed toward the happiness of any one class (*Republic*, 421B-C and 519E-520A), ostensibly to placate Glaucon’s concern that philosophers would be done an injustice to be forced to rule. But if Alfarabi is correct in his emphasis, Socrates’ rebuttal takes on a different character: that the full happiness of the philosopher is, in fact, dependent upon a well-ordered city that provides him with the “relish” of human contact and affection (*Selected Aphorisms*, 61).

⁵⁴ Alfarabi, *Selected Aphorisms*, 81

If souls are the organs of the city, what organ would the philosopher be in this analogy⁵⁵? It is tempting to make him the heart (or the brain, for us), but he has an existence independent of the body. As a physician to the city, the philosophical king exists, to some extent, outside of the city. Unlike the body, which arises naturally and needs intervention to fix only illnesses, the philosopher arranges the city and tends to it continuously. Alfarabi points out that the greater the endeavor, the greater the need for prudence or practical judgment. And “prudence is what the public calls intellect. And when this faculty is in a human being, he is called intelligent⁵⁶”.

Summary

It is important to note what appears to be political conservatism in Plato’s dialogues. It is Plato’s Socrates who tries to dissuade Alcibiades from going before the Athenian people and embarking on a political career. Socrates similarly hopes to prevent Hippocrates from beginning a political education with the sophist Protagoras. The Eliatic Stranger paints a terrifying portrait of the statesman for his audience, Theaetetus and Young Socrates, presenting political knowledge as impossible to attain and political power as dangerous to hold.

⁵⁵ Thomas Hobbes identifies sovereigns as the artificial soul of the Leviathan, counselors “by whom all things needful for it [the artificial body] to know are suggested unto it, are the memory” and equity and laws are “an artificial reason and will”. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Introduction. The philosopher’s place in the Leviathan is no different from that of ordinary men unless he occupies one of these roles.

⁵⁶ Alfarabi, *Selected Aphorisms*, 42

The investigation into the sort of knowledge necessary to be a statesman ends in aporia, but in this regard political science is not sui generis; Plato always seems to want us to acknowledge the difficulty of making the human things fully intelligible. While we cannot, it seems, arrive at definitive conclusions about the highest things, we can arrive at provisional conclusions suitable to our circumstances. Socrates does not mean to suggest that philosophers cannot or should not rule, but that the proper orientation toward ruling should be one of reticence rather than eagerness. Political life requires making decisions based on limited information, and if the philosopher does not legislate or rule, someone else will. This is precisely the situation the Athenian Stranger finds himself in: either he or Kleinias must legislate.

This view is not altogether tragic. After all, the city ruled by perfect intelligence seems to be like that ruled by Kronos: the inhabitants of the city – they can no longer be called citizens – are more like cattle than human beings. In wisdom, too, there must be moderation. There may be a grain of truth in the myth Protagoras tells Socrates in the *Protagoras*: to form a city, every citizen must have a share of virtue. It is for this reason that Alfarabi points out that no organ should operate at the expense of the whole body.

Though perfect wisdom in a ruler is neither possible nor seems to be desirable, because such rule would have the appearance of utter tyranny⁵⁷, the outstanding

⁵⁷ See Aristotle's *Politics*, 1261a10-1261b20 for a criticism of taking Socrates too seriously with regard to his claim that the city should, as much as possible, resemble a single soul. Because cities are by nature a multiplicity comprising many human beings, the city being one in the manner of the soul would require that all intellectual virtues be found in the guardians and only in the guardians. This is clearly impossible,

intellect seems to be important to political rule for Plato and Aristotle. The *Laws* gradually reveals to us that legislation cannot be an instantaneous, immutable act. If it were possible to legislate perfectly in such a way that the constitution of the city would endure, the city would resemble the ship of Theseus, reconstituted over time by mere replacement of its materials. The *Republic* would have no need of a philosophical guardian class, nor would the *Laws* require a Nocturnal Council.

The changing circumstances of political life are exactly what legislation hopes to minimize, but wise rulers must always have a way to recollect the understanding that informed the legislation when the city is subjected to change. Though Plato's Socrates uses memory as a foil, memory itself is not to blame, insofar as it is a record of our experiences. The way we use memory is troublesome because it blurs the lines between self and other, and between our own investigations and the opinions of others. When Socrates says that he "pays attention" to what others say, he is still using his memory, but it is a memory that preserves attribution to whoever has given a particular speech. It is also a memory being exercised in coordination with the searching that accompanies dialectic. When Socrates intimates that thinking is like a dialogue one has with oneself, he is showing the paradoxical contrast between his own memory and that of Theaetetus: Socrates' memory allows him to have a discussion within himself as though there were many, but Theaetetus cannot think at

because the ability to reason is what sets humans apart; but even if it could be done, the city would cease to be a city. Excessive wisdom in rule is therefore not wise, because it would be putting the guardians' judgment constantly in place of that of the rest of the city, reducing the humanity of the citizens.

all because his memories have taken on the appearance of his own knowledge. Though Socrates is one, he is many; though Theaetetus is many, he is one.

Memory is another form of seeming. It allows one to seem like one knows, insofar as one is able to parrot back the opinions of others. As expressed through tradition, it takes on the gravitas of myth and legend. Memory becomes more pernicious the more one relies upon it, and the more it pretends to be knowledge as opposed to mere record. The philosopher must always leave breadcrumbs, then, to allow the work of recollection. The laws have preludes not merely to educate citizens in virtue, but to illuminate the path back to the source of legislating. The *Laws* is narrated over the course of a bright day on the way to the cave of Zeus, though with stops in the shade. The laws, it seems, are the skein of thread that allows us to navigate our way back into the sun. This navigation must always be an intensely intellectual effort, limited by the combination of one's natural intellectual abilities and one's education.

Human intelligence served an important function in classical political philosophy. It is useful not only for managing the passions, which allows political community to become possible at all, but as a means of discovering the truth about all things, including the best regime. Plato emphasizes the difference between memory and thinking, which is analogous to the difference between legislating and ruling; the use of thinking is what bridges the gap between opinion and intelligence in the Platonic sense. The ability to recollect and to think is necessary if one is to have leadership that is able to keep the laws in mind while adjusting for changing

circumstances in the world. One therefore needs philosophical intelligence, or guardians in the most precise sense.

Chapter 3: Machiavelli and Intelligence

In this chapter, I will first provide some background as to Machiavelli's place in the tradition of political philosophy, and introduce the terminology he uses to describe intelligence. Next, I will use Machiavelli's comedies, the *Mandragola* and the *Clizia*, as domestic examples of Machiavellian political principles. I will do this by reference to his political works, with the intention of drawing out aspects of his political theory that are less clear from the overt teachings of the *Prince* and *Discourses*. Finally, I look more closely at the terminology Machiavelli uses to describe intelligence to argue that Machiavelli recognizes differences in innate intellectual powers, and that he feels these differences are critical to political life. Throughout the chapter, I make reference to a frequent Machiavellian theme: appealing to bold youth, guided by old prudence. This theme represents a break with the classical philosophers in one sense, but in another preserves the tradition by supplying a very different conclusion given similar premises.

Machiavelli's emphasis on the effectual truth and practical politics is widely understood as a break with classical political theory. To what extent is his perpetual republic compatible with the tradition of intelligent, philosophical rule? The tradition is carried forward, even as it undergoes a radical alteration under Machiavelli. To be sure, Machiavelli does not accept Aristotle's theory of the intellect, and utterly rejects the Thomistic interpretation. Machiavelli's new political science is active and

dynamic, and it relies centrally on human intellect and intellectual differences. Machiavelli abandons the conservative character of classical political philosophy, appealing to youth as the engines of change, on one side, and a new intellectual elite to guide them on the other.

Machiavelli is so synonymous with cleverness and social manipulation that the term “Machiavellian intelligence” has a special significance in psychological research⁵⁸. The alternative term, “the social brain,” belies the benign gloss – as well as dramatic simplification – with which social science treats Machiavellian strategies. While Machiavelli or Machiavellianism is popularly associated with ruthless amorality and manipulation, he is less associated with the idea of the philosopher king, or philosophical rule generally, in part because his advice seems too evil to be philosophical⁵⁹. While Machiavelli clearly places an emphasis on intelligence, it is more controversial to associate him with anything that could be called philosophical rule. Machiavelli both distrusted and despised the kind of idleness or leisure that made Athenian philosophy possible, and particularly the “ambitious leisure” that characterized Italy in his time. The strange coincidence of temporal and priestly power has made the moderns effeminate⁶⁰, assisted by the coopted Greek philosophy that makes men “less esteem the honor of the world.” At the same time, Machiavelli relied on philosophy, history, and reasoning in his own mode and with a bolder stance toward the political. Whereas Athenian philosophy can be said to be fenced in by the

⁵⁸ See Gavrilets and Vose, “The Dynamics of Machiavellian Intelligence”

⁵⁹ Cf. Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, pp. 10, 295

⁶⁰ *Discourses*, II 2.2

fear generated by Socrates' death, Machiavelli implies the passionate intellect cannot help but rule⁶¹. The question of philosophic rule is that of orientation and focus; for Plato and Aristotle, rule is a duty or compulsion, and the philosopher king longs for the repose of old age in which he can contemplate what is⁶². For Machiavelli, politics is the primary and proper focus of intellectual labor, and age is the enemy that saps the vigor necessary to take action⁶³.

Machiavelli emphasized the necessity of political involvement, and contemporary reliance on the civil service and scientific experts seems to bear his view out. Because we live in an era that expects scientific or technological solutions to most problems – even problems that are created by science and technology – science is necessarily political and cannot exist outside of political influence. In this sense, it is easy to side with Machiavelli's assertions that intellectuals cannot withdraw from political life. Machiavelli was vexed by a Church that had coopted Aristotle and made his philosophy – transformed into dogma – very much a political presence. This, however, preceded the break between the study of philosophy and the study of natural science. The contemporary view represents a return to the prejudice of ancient Athens, when philosophy was held to be useless to the city; the critical difference is in the praise of natural science. Machiavelli's new political science finds ways to engage with the political process indirectly and covertly, and is therefore

⁶¹ *Discourses*, I 5.2

⁶² Cf *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1141a20-30; for Aristotle, it would be absurd to believe that politics is the highest or most serious form of knowledge.

⁶³ *Art of War*, I 47-48

extremely useful to influence our own democracy, especially when it may be hostile to what it perceives as elitism.

Machiavelli provides hints of his new considerations of intelligence with what at first appears to be a throwaway line – as though Machiavelli has any throwaway lines – after explaining that the *Prince* is the result of learning “from long experience of modern things and a continuous reading of ancient ones.”⁶⁴ The *Prince* was a gift for Lorenzo de’ Medici, and was not published until after Machiavelli’s death. The *Prince* has two audiences: princes and potential princes like Lorenzo and posterity. He tells us that the greatest gift he could bestow is to “give you the capacity to understand (*facultà di potere intendere*) in very short time all that I have learned and understood (*conosciuto*) in so many years and with so many hardships and dangers to myself.”⁶⁵ *Facultà* appears three times in the *Prince*. The second and third occurrences are in chapter 16, having the meaning of resources and ability. The prince, attempting to be liberal, cannot help but squander his resources. We should understand by this that Machiavelli’s own resources are limitless, his own ability indefatigable. It is further interesting that the verb *intendere* is the same word Machiavelli uses to set forth the three classes of brains⁶⁶. The first understands

⁶⁴ All quotations from the *Prince* and the *Discourses on Livy* are taken from Harvey Mansfield’s translations (University of Chicago, 1998 and 1996). Quotations from the *Art of War* are taken from Christopher Lynch’s translation (University of Chicago, 2003). I rely on Mera J. Flaumenhaft’s translation of the *Mandragola* (Waveland, 1981), and Daniel T. Gallagher’s translation of the *Clizia* (Waveland, 1996). Where I deviate, or where further explanation and interpretation key terms in Italian is required, I note it in the text.

⁶⁵ Machiavelli, *Prince*, Dedicatory Letter

⁶⁶ *Prince*, Ch. 22

(*intende*) by itself, but the second merely discerns (*discerne*) what others understand. To discern what Machiavelli understands is to marvel at his wisdom, or to be capable of instruction. The distinction between understanding and discerning is reminiscent of how Aristotle distinguishes astuteness (*sunesis*) as recognizing the practical judgment of another person⁶⁷. Machiavelli, however, implies that one can ascend from discerning to understanding by oneself.

Does Machiavelli really mean, then, that by studying in the way he proposes we will be able to understand by ourselves, overcoming the mere discerning that seems natural to those of us without Machiavelli's intellect? By drawing this parallel between the kind of cognition the most excellent brain is capable of and the kind of understanding Machiavelli is able to provide us, he seems to promise the possibility of a new brain. This seems self-contradictory, as Machiavelli uses the word *cervelli* (brains) instead of *animi* (minds), and altogether avoids *anime* (souls). He therefore suggests that human intelligence is situated in an organ of the body; it is a bodily intelligence. By discussing the types of brains as organs, he implies not only that intelligence has a material cause, but that intelligence varies in the same way that other parts of the body vary between human beings. Can we truly change our brains any more than we can change our height? If Lorenzo, or we, have the second class of brain, then what Machiavelli seems to promise is truly surprising, or he retracts his promise. To keep his word, Machiavelli must supply us with the faculty of a most excellent brain.

⁶⁷ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1143a10-20

Machiavelli's primary mode of expressing intelligent action is through prudence, but Machiavelli uses the term in a wide variety of ways and circumstances. The only certain feature of prudence is that Machiavelli means something different by it than the traditional Aristotelian definition of practical judgment. For Aristotle, practical judgment is the bridge that links the abstract world of wisdom and intellect with the temporal world of particular events. The realm of practical judgment is variable human experience, to which what is ultimately true does not directly apply. Because practical judgment is reliant on wisdom, and is an expression of it, practical judgment is constrained within the bounds of moral virtue. Its dependence on wisdom further serves as a bar to the young because practical judgment requires both experience and wisdom. An Alcibiades can have no hope, in Aristotle's formulation, of acquiring practical judgment in his youth; he is unsuitable for political life – whatever his other qualities – because he is young and lacks the experience of particulars necessary to the formation of practical judgment⁶⁸. As such, the young are constitutionally unfit for politics - the quintessential object of practical wisdom.

Machiavelli pulls these dependencies apart: he has seized upon an ancient criticism of philosophy, articulated in the *Clouds*: philosophy lacks practical application. Unlike Aristophanes, however, Machiavelli believes that the problem of philosophy is soluble and that he has a solution. His political philosophy disregards the classical hierarchy of ways of life⁶⁹, and instead focuses on the practical realities of ruling and government that were obscured in the ancient accounts. Machiavelli's

⁶⁸ Cf. *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1142a16-18

⁶⁹ Cf. Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, pg. 295

pretense – abandoning philosophy as a mode of inquiring into political life – creates a radical new necessity for precisely the kinds of intelligent minds that are most capable of it.

Aristotle's characterization of practical judgment as a faculty that requires time and experience to develop would exclude youth from politics; Aristotle thereby reinforces the Socratic reticence to engage in politics until firmer conclusions can be drawn and spirit has dampened. Machiavelli views prudence as something teachable, or at least obtainable from an intermediary. Because Machiavelli is comfortable with acquisition, he is unconcerned about the philosophical purity of young princes. Rather, he wants them to approach their acquisition with both intelligence and boldness; if such a combination cannot be found in a single human being, the young prince must listen to one who can provide the intelligence and prudence that he himself lacks. But old prudence must make way for young boldness⁷⁰. The old prudence may be Machiavelli himself, or his teachings conveyed by his captains who then directly teach the young. This formulation is almost a paean to liberal education, insofar as the young take counsel from the great minds before them, supplementing through education what nature does not supply on her own.

Machiavelli speaks to the young and offers an end-run around this difficulty: he provides the reader with the experience available from history. Such a solution is different from the well-worn adage that those who forget history are condemned to repeat it, because Machiavelli is neither interested in providing faithful accounts of

⁷⁰ *Discourses*, I 60

history, nor in inductively creating a set of rules from an array of particular historical occurrences. Plato and Aristotle have not given us practical judgment, leaving that to our life experiences. Machiavelli realizes just how dear those experiences are to those who wish to rule and who do not have the luxury of learning from mistakes. As such, he embarks on a different kind of philosophical education. Since it is “good to reason about everything⁷¹,” he argues seemingly empirically from historical examples. In effect, Machiavelli supplies us with the experience in ruling that we lack, which would be too dangerous for us to acquire in the course of becoming rulers.

Why does Machiavelli resort to history as the basis of his political philosophy? Machiavelli had before him the examples of Plato and Aristotle and almost two thousand years of philosophers, scholars, and imitators who used similar modes of expression. The classical philosophers had understood that different kinds of arguments should be used for different human beings; the best form of philosophical teaching is in person and literally *ad hominem*⁷² – to the man himself, not to the general audience on whom the speaker would need to rely to follow and understand. This need for caution⁷³ can be resolved either by refraining from writing or by writing esoterically.

The difference in Machiavelli’s mode is not identical with the dichotomy of esoteric versus exoteric; exoteric philosophy would look more like an Aristotelian

⁷¹ *Discourses*, I 18.1

⁷² Aristotle distinguishes *apodeixis haplos* and *pros tonde*: demonstration simply as opposed to relative to the interlocutor, cf. *Metaphysics*, 11062a1-10

⁷³ *Discourses*, III 6.8: “Everyone should guard himself from writing as from a reef, for there is nothing that convicts you so easily than what is written by your own hand.”

treatise than a Machiavellian history lesson. Machiavelli's main political works adopt neither the mode of Xenophon, who wrote a fictional history in his *Cyropaedia*⁷⁴, nor Thucydides who wrote directly of real historical events, but added his own commentary to the overarching narrative⁷⁵. Instead, Machiavelli provides us with snippets of what appear to be historical object lessons that make the particular point that he has derived from his study. To write a historical narrative is to ground one's thinking too specifically to the particular circumstances; Livy can do so, because he had, as it were, the whole of the Roman republic and empire to draw from, his criticisms were directed at the existing Roman state, and he did not appear to make a project of managing future captains of Rome. While general rules may be derived over the course of such a narrative, their presentation is circumscribed by the need for linear storytelling. So, while philosophy is constructed too often in the air, history *qua* history is much too close to the ground. What Machiavelli provided is instead a philosophy that is grounded in the experience of history, but is not constrained by the necessity of telling a story; nor, indeed, by the requirement that history must be faithfully relayed.

The Political Teachings of *Clizia* and *Mandragola*

The plots of both *Clizia* and *Mandragola* are driven by the carnal desires of passionate young men. Because the plays are directed toward the most private of

⁷⁴ But see *Mandragola*

⁷⁵ But see the *Florentine Histories*

human experiences, the family and sex, they both appear to be apolitical from the outset; influenced by but not elaborative of Machiavelli's political works. Machiavelli's characters, however, are not Machiavelli himself. Their ambitions are much more parochial, so that they may rule intelligently, but not philosophically. Machiavelli's political works are intentionally difficult and contain contradictions that require the reader to compare his varying counsels. The plays provide us with a rare insight into Machiavellian machinations from start to finish, with an internally consistent narrative. Such a narrative, in turn, allows us some insight into the less accessible political works. It would be an error to assume that the plays represent a more concrete or final version of Machiavelli's political teachings, but they give another way to examine the roles of the Machiavellian political cast: the prince, the minister, the priest, the captain, and the people.

Machiavelli holds that a state may be "ruined by women"⁷⁶, which is to say that what men, and especially princes, do on account of women represents an existential threat to the state. The essential task of the true prince – of the person who wields judgment rather than authority – is to manage passions so that the apparent prince is able to gain the property and women he desires without risking the whole enterprise. The Machiavellian comedies depict the young who are helpless in the face of their passions, unable to summon the ingenuity to engineer their own success. But not all of the young are helpless.

⁷⁶ *Discourses*, II 26; cf. *Prince*, Ch. 19

Clizia is a comedy because of the apparent imbalance of power between Nicomaco as head of household and his wife and son, Sofronia and Cleandro. Were Cleandro himself powerful or ambitious, Machiavelli would have instead written a tragedy. The young are a necessity in any republic and they are the necessary materials with which armies are constructed, but they have a particular ambition all their own. Machiavelli tells us that it is better to temporize with inconveniences in a state than to strike them⁷⁷. He begins that chapter of the *Discourses* by discussing the dictator as a means of bypassing ordinary debate and deliberation in a republic. The kinds of inconveniences are either external or internal, but internal inconveniences are far more likely, such as when a citizen gains too much strength, or a fundamental law has been undermined. We are confronted with a comparison of the dictator, who uses extraordinary powers through a legal means, with citizens who are able to seize extraordinary authority through extralegal means. The young are a principle threat. Human beings desire the beginnings of things, and they especially admire potential in those who are both young and virtuous. The nature of youth is such that it wants its own way; even more than others, they desire everything but are unable to attain it⁷⁸. The nature of the multitude is to desire to make use of able youths and to admire them until youthful ambition becomes a crisis. The multitude, lacking prudence, often desires its own ruin⁷⁹.

⁷⁷ *Discourses*, I 33

⁷⁸ *Discourses*, I 37

⁷⁹ *Discourses*, I 53.1

Plato's Socrates would charge philosophers with attempting to divest youths of their ambition in favor of a conservative, cautious political stance. For Machiavelli, the question is how should one temporize with youthful ambition, and the answer seems to be that is harmful for the city to fail to honor a youth who has shown so much virtue as to become known for a notable thing; even if the post for which he is chosen needs the prudence of the old⁸⁰. So the youth must be fitted with an artificial prudence, and this can come about either through "that utility for which one should seek knowledge of histories⁸¹" or from those who have acquired prudence through long experience and who can supply this knowledge as advice.

Intelligence in the classical view is used to dampen ambition, but Machiavelli sees youthful energy and acquisitiveness as the vehicle of intelligence. The worldly conquests of youth are the material from which intellectual victories are crafted. The Machiavellian advisor, in his purest form, supplies new modes and orders not only to the prince's new state, but to the intellectual state as well. The desire to acquire intellectually can then be distinguished from the desire to acquire materially, but the combination of the two establishes Machiavellian political philosophy as an attempt at comprehensive ruling.

Machiavelli provides a series of models for the role for the advisor: Sofronia, Lugurio, Fabrizio, the minister or advisor, and Machiavelli himself. "Prudence consists in knowing how to recognize the qualities of inconveniences, and in picking

⁸⁰ *Discourses*, I 60

⁸¹ *Discourses*, I Preface

the less bad as good.⁸²” Unlike Aristotle’s practical judgment, Machiavelli’s prudence has no moral dimension; it does not aim at choosing what is good for human beings, but merely that which is less bad. Any state that exists for a long time will be faced with a large number of inconveniences, whether imposed from without or within. Such is the result of living in a world populated with barbarians on the outside and potential tyrants on the inside. For Machiavelli, it is impossible to eliminate inconveniences. For every inconvenience one suppresses, another emerges⁸³. Therefore, one chooses the course that presents fewer inconveniences from the outset.

Sofronia and Cleandro

The machinations of Ligurio and Sofronia are necessarily of a lower order because they are directed toward domestic concerns rather than matters of state. Both schemers are paired with otherwise helpless lovers who rely on them for satisfaction. While Ligurio seems to depict the more recognizable Machiavellian advisor, Sofronia appears indifferent to her son’s pleadings (“But I tell you this plainly, that if I believed I’d be taking her out of Nicomaco’s hands just to put her into yours, I wouldn’t intervene in this⁸⁴”). Sofronia pursues her own ambitions while attempting to manage the passions of both Nicomaco and Cleandro. The servants, Eustachio and Pirro, are partisans, each expecting to benefit from the triumph of his respective master. In consistent Machiavellian mode, Sofronia desires wealth and position for

⁸² *Prince*, Ch. XXI

⁸³ *Discourses*, I 6

⁸⁴ *Clizia*, Act 3, Scene 3

her family; ambition that happens to have the common good as a result. The subject matter with which she must work is altogether poor; Nicomaco has means but can think only of satisfying carnal desires. If virtue is “knowing how to do something⁸⁵,” Cleandro appears to have no independent virtue beyond whatever wealth he might inherit from his father.

It appears that Sofronia’s virtue has remained hidden until this crisis. Much like Machiavelli’s depiction of Brutus⁸⁶, she simulated the obedient wife until such time as she could overthrow the existing regime and take control of it for her own purposes. It is only when her husband has displayed sufficient vulnerability, and when she is able to sexually humiliate him, that she can remake the family with herself as head. Similar to Machiavelli’s depiction of Pacuvius Calanus, the humiliation is a form of election in which the existing authority is upheld in name only by undermining its claims to superiority⁸⁷. *Clizia* illustrates in miniature what is necessary to return a state to its beginnings. Machiavelli’s audience would have expected that Sofronia and Nicomaco were married for advantage, not love. Cleandro characterizes Nicomaco as willing to put his son in prison, send his wife away, and burn down the family home⁸⁸. That is, he is willing to dissolve the entire state for shortsighted acquisition. Sofronia demonstrates the kind of intelligence necessary to establish a new order with the same face; the kind of intelligence that can use cruelty well.

⁸⁵ *Clizia*, Act 2, Scene 3

⁸⁶ *Discourses*, III 2

⁸⁷ *Discourses*, I 47.2

⁸⁸ *Clizia*, Act 3, Scene 3

Sofronia also shows the kind of tumult that arises from keeping intelligence hidden. Machiavelli sees tumult as a valuable way to keep republics healthy. For Machiavelli, the prudent person holds back and plans until she finds the right time to conquer; she accepts an outwardly subservient role that gives her the opportunity to wield her influence when it is most convenient for her and least convenient for those who hold power. It would be better in a political community, however, if we could know who these intelligent people are, and allow them to deliberate and order things from an earlier point. In the Machiavellian comedy, the revelation of Sofronia's superiority is perfectly timed with Fortuna, so that Clizia's noble birth is revealed to resolve the conflict in Sofronia's favor. The comedy, in fact, depends upon internal conflict to provide tension and drive the plot; this theme resonates with Machiavelli's political arguments. In real politics, however, it would be better not to have to wait for a Brutus to reveal himself, or for intelligent people to solve political problems when they are at their climax. Rather, it would be preferable to have such people readied and involved with political life, so that they would be prepared in extraordinary circumstances. The life of the mathematician or scientist is no preparation for political activity.

Ligurio and Callimaco

Turning to the *Mandragola*, Callimaco is in an altogether different position than Cleandro. He is an orphan returning from a self-imposed exile in France. As the protagonist, Callimaco has not inherited a metaphorical kingdom from his parents; while he has some wealth, it provides no direct means of attaining the married

Lucrezia. Callimaco arrives in Italy with the start of what cannot yet be called a conspiracy, but a firm disposition⁸⁹ to take Lucrezia for himself. When Callimaco reveals that he has left France to find Lucrezia and seduce her, his servant Siro responds “If you’d spoken to me about it in Paris, I’d have known what to advise you⁹⁰,” i.e., to stay in France and forget Lucrezia. Callimaco has, in effect, chosen his necessity. He lived a life “with very great happiness,” but blames fortune for making him aware of Lucrezia’s beauty. Machiavelli denies the possibility of an Aristotelian stable condition of happiness, because no matter what human beings have, they always wish to acquire more. The play is grounded in the desire to acquire and conspiracy, and it is marked by the absence of external demands on the young prince – the scheme is required solely because he is able desire without being able to attain⁹¹.

The reason Callimaco is unable to attain, in this case, is that he has exhausted his knowledge of how to seduce. Lucrezia’s nature is such that she will not respond to amorous advances, her husband is rich and the marriage has no obvious defects, she has no interest in social gatherings common to women her age, and there is no servant or tradesman he could trick or bribe into using to get close to her. His conspiracy is cut off because his existing modes are circumscribed by her orders, so that what are needed are new modes on his part to create a new order on hers. Callimaco’s solution is to employ an advisor, a former marriage broker and beggar, Ligurio, who is

⁸⁹ Cf. *Discourses*, III 6.2

⁹⁰ *Mandragola*, Scene I, Act I

⁹¹ Cf. *Discourses*, I 37

suspicious precisely because he has the qualities necessary to execute the plan. Callimaco begins to follow the advice Machiavelli gives in chapter twenty-two of the *Prince*, promising to make him rich to “keep him good.” Ligurio, in his turn, has “desire for you to satisfy this desire of yours almost as much as you do yourself.”⁹²

Ligurio, like Machiavelli himself, is willing “to play the servant to one who can wear a better coat than he can.”⁹³ The advisor, who has a first rate brain, is paired with young man who has means and spirit. Callimaco is not altogether stupid like Lucrezia’s husband, Nicia, and is capable of learning from Ligurio how to execute a plan. But the suspicion with which Callimaco initially treats Ligurio speaks to a deeper Machiavellian issue. Fortune does not seem to give everything to men, so that those who are most intelligent have little fortune, and those who are less or least intelligent may have much. This difference in natures threatens war between the haves and the have-nots, in so far as the have-nots are capable of outwitting the haves. The solution seems to be to satisfy the differing ambitions of the two factions: the young and ambitious want power, and the intelligent want means and a different class of glory. This apparent solution is proven insufficient by the credulity of Nicia, who is convinced of Callimaco’s genius by his ability to speak Latin. Nicia’s vanity is such that he believes he can assess Callimaco’s knowledge and learning by speaking to him⁹⁴. Intelligence is the instrument of intention, and the intentions provided in *Mandragola* are necessarily inferior because they originate from Callimaco and

⁹² *Mandragola*, Act I, Scene 3

⁹³ *Mandragola*, Prologue

⁹⁴ *Mandragola*, Act II, Scene 1

Nicia. The true designs of the advisor must remain hidden and left for us to guess because second-rate minds only understand second-rate motives. A loftier goal is at best stupefying and at worst misinterpreted.

The combination of Callimaco and Ligurio shows that their association gives Callimaco the appearance of having Ligurio's talents. Under the influence of Ligurio, Callimaco appears intelligent and capable of reasoning from means to ends. Ligurio, however, is also lacking: for all of his ability, Ligurio is in a mean state. Ligurio's circumstances cannot be explained by mere class differences, because it is clear that he is able to easily plan profitable schemes. Ligurio's defect, then, is that he has intelligence but not heart. Intelligence allows us to solve problems, but it does not necessarily point us toward the problems to solve. The classical philosophers argued that the city was an outgrowth of human nature, and so the highest object of political philosophy is to craft the best city. Having rejected this premise, Machiavelli argues that the intelligent person has his own objectives, but that these are not necessarily political in the ordinary sense. His focus on these seemingly impractical objectives comes at the expense of material ambition. Without ambition and acquisition, the intellect is wasted, to the detriment of the state. Modern governments are acquisitive economically if not martially, and the electorate has its own desires that it expects its representatives to pursue on its behalf. The combination of intelligent government and ambitious governed serves to create a whole through which desire and intelligence may be directed to the same objects. Still, we cannot forget that, even for Machiavelli, it is the job of the prudent to manage ambition rather than merely satisfying it.

Sostrata, Lucrezia's mother, points out that she's "heard it said" that it is "the duty of a prudent person to take the best among bad courses."⁹⁵ This saying reminds one of chapter 21 of the *Prince*⁹⁶, but adds the uncharacteristic elements of second-hand understanding and duty. This advice is suitable for Nicia, who is concerned with reputation and criminal charges rather than moral culpability for murder⁹⁷. The prudence of third-rate men, however, is exactly of this kind: seeking to rationalize what they already want to do and accepting the authority of others in place of their own thinking. Machiavelli lays out a puzzle for us: we are often deceived in thinking we are prudent when we are actually the pawn of another. It is not as though Nicia has a trusting nature; indeed, he is worried that Callimaco will sell him "empty bladders" rather than a cure for his wife's sterility. Each of Callimaco, Nicia, and Ligurio is obliged to place faith in others to achieve his ends, and has few ways of assessing the reliability of his conspirators. But Callimaco's spiritedness and Nicia's desire to have a family make them incapable of sound judgment. Machiavelli points out in the discourses: "the greed for dominating that blinds him also blinds him in managing the enterprise."⁹⁸ The advisor, then, fulfills another role: he is able to manage the enterprise because he is not passionate about its success, or because he is capable of being rational enough to manage his greed in addition to the enterprise. But it is this impartiality or indifference that makes the advisor incapable of standing

⁹⁵ *Mandragola*, Act III, Scene 1

⁹⁶ *Prince*, Ch. XXI: "prudence consists in knowing how to recognize the qualities of inconveniences, and in picking the less bad as good."

⁹⁷ *Mandragola*, Act II, Scene 6

⁹⁸ *Discourses*, III 6.3

alone, *uno da solo*, because the enterprise itself is crafted by others. Callimaco summons Ligurio only after having decided upon the general path he was to take, and it seems that advisors are constrained to correct the inconveniences that arise from the immoderate and immutable passions of those who must dominate.

Ligurio is thus careful to tell Nicia to keep quiet with Frate Timoteo, saying that while Nicia understands books, he does not understand “the things of the world” (*cose del mondo*). His admonition calls to mind Machiavelli’s own response to the French Cardinal, that the French do not understand *le cose del mondo*. In that anecdote, understanding of politics, or worldly things, is opposed to the understanding of war. What Ligurio has in mind is subtler than war, however; it is conspiracy. Ligurio recognizes the Frate as a kind of rival; “whoever isn’t used to them [priests] could be tricked, and not know how to lead one to his purpose.⁹⁹” Ligurio thus devises a test for the priest, asking his assistance in convincing a girl to have an abortion. It seems to be difficult to judge the loyalty of coconspirators against princes because you have to make an experiment, and the experiment must contain enough danger to prove their willingness to go through with the deed. But no experiment can have as much danger or enormity as killing the prince, and so it is impossible to devise such a test. The stakes are lower than this for Ligurio, and he is able to illustrate an experiment that tests faith – in both senses of the term – as much or greater than the genuine task. Nicia’s pretended deafness is used to underscore the importance of secrecy; Ligurio says to Frate Timoteo that speaking to Nicia would

⁹⁹ *Mandragola*, Act III, Scene 2

require filling the piazza with noise¹⁰⁰. The piazza is a symbol of open, honest discourse, and transition out of the piazza implies transcending into the palazzo¹⁰¹. To show Timoteo's wiliness, Machiavelli makes him tell us that he understands the test as such; even so, he is willing to go through with the plan because he judges that the trick is to his profit and he will "get a lot from each of them."¹⁰²

Lucrezia is forced into a passive role despite being "wise and good," and is therefore subject to the necessities of others. One who endeavors to do good in all things is ruined among those who are not good. In *Clizia*, Sofronia believes that "one ought to do good all the time, and it's so much more welcome for it to be done on those occasions when others are doing evil."¹⁰³ But Sofronia's idea of the good, as opposed to Lucrezia's, is based on achieving advantage and not throwing away potential gain¹⁰⁴. Lucrezia's idea of the good, based in Christian principles, is vulnerable to Frate Timoteo not merely because he is a confessor, but because it looks to moral purity without evaluating whether purity is a liability or an asset. Christian morality is susceptible to casuistry because it is received from an authority and seeks to please an authority who can give no final verdict in this world. Hence, Frate Timoteo can "dupe her by her goodness."¹⁰⁵ But Lucrezia could not ultimately surrender to Callimaco were she truly "good" in the sense that she understands it. When going to meet with the Frate, she says "I sweat from *passione*" (*Io sudo per la*

¹⁰⁰ *Mandragola*, Act III, Scene 4

¹⁰¹ Cf. *Discourses*, I 47.3

¹⁰² *Mandragola*, Act III, Scene 9

¹⁰³ *Clizia*, Act II, Scene 3

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Mandragola*, Act III, Scene 9

passione). Her passion conveys a dual meaning: religious suffering and erotic desire. These meanings are interdependent, as her religious suffering is increased by the erotic tension the situation provokes. In this way, despite her wisdom and goodness, Lucrezia is handicapped by her inability to reconcile her natural desires with the demands of her husband on the one side, and the church on the other.

Lucrezia is a Machiavellian object lesson: wisdom is ineffectual when it is unable to come to terms with appetite. Frate Timoteo comments to Lucrezia that there “are many things that from far away seem terrible, unbearable, strange, and when you get near them they are humane, bearable, familiar.”¹⁰⁶ He speaks to her as though she were a soldier going into battle, faced with an enemy who is tricking her into believing it is more fearsome than it is¹⁰⁷. But this speech also shows that he is speaking to Lucrezia’s hidden, erotic nature. As her captain in the endeavor, he shows her that the enemy offers tricks, and encourages her into battle against them. She will find her encounter with Callimaco humane, bearable, and familiar; her good nature will be overridden by the external sanction of her confessor and the internal surrender to desire. It is only once Lucrezia has freed herself from her morality that she is able to clearly see the good that may be derived from immorality. That is, her prudence is inhibited and blinded by the moral aim Aristotle puts at the heart of practical judgment.

Machiavelli argues that what we usually consider to be goodness and wisdom is defective, because it is ultimately unable to come to terms with what would

¹⁰⁶ *Mandragola*, Act III, Scene 11

¹⁰⁷ Cf. *Discourses*, III 14.3

actually make us happy. The implication for philosophical rule is that it should seek to satisfy appetites, and manage the inconveniences that come with them. On the other hand, have we not already inherited Machiavelli's teachings in this regard? If counseling evil is the correction for people too cowed by the Church to recognize their own interests, would the moderating influence not be to counsel goodness to a people who are already materialistic? Intelligent, philosophical rule would need to take into account the character of those people it governs. It would be unfair to paint Machiavelli as being inflexible; his philosophy has the institution of new modes and orders at its very core, which requires acknowledging the totality of circumstances. Machiavelli's conception of human nature is fixed, but its expressions vary based on the virtue of the people. If we attempt to take Machiavelli's suggestions to heart, then, we must contextualize them within our own modes and orders.

Callimaco's monologue, once the trap has been set, seems to be a different kind of "mirror of princes," in which he reveals his vulnerability and uncertainty¹⁰⁸. This is not the kind of competence one might expect from a young, Machiavellian prince. After all, Machiavelli depicts Manlius Torquatus as hard or even savage, Valerius Corvinus as humane but capable, and Fabius Maximum Cunctator as reticent but strategically so. But here we see into the doubts and fears of the young prince on the verge of accomplishing his coup, worried that "fortune and nature keep the account in balance; the one never does you a good turn that on the other side something evil doesn't surge up." His introspection exposes the difference between

¹⁰⁸ *Mandragola*, Act IV, Scene 1

captains, who have been trained in sites, and princes who endeavor to establish new modes and orders, which have the same danger and quality as “seek[ing] unknown waters and lands.¹⁰⁹” Such a prince has an appetite for novelty that adherence to tradition and existing modes will not satisfy. He is capable of forming the desire, but incapable of achieving the result. So Callimaco’s doubts are grounded in a prudent fear, insofar as they recognize that perfect solutions do not exist and that one must anticipate future inconveniences when remediating present ones. But his need for Ligurio is exposed by his inability to know the qualities of those inconveniences and concoct a strategy taking them into account. Ligurio must even counsel Callimaco in how to woo Lucrezia¹¹⁰. Ligurio’s reassurances and schemes are not enough to alter Callimaco’s nature. He is immediately plunged back into self-doubt when Ligurio leaves to find the Frate¹¹¹.

Callimaco’s need to either conquer or die trying exposes both his strength and his weakness. His youth, energy, and passion allow him to pursue his desires with boldness, but these same desires gnaw away at him and let him fear failure. Machiavelli could not have discussed this kind of princely weakness when writing to a prince, nor would belaboring doubt be helpful when inspiring youth to action. But Callimaco’s failure is one of knowledge; he does not yet know how to approach the large task of seducing Lucrezia and establishing a long-term state. Ligurio, initially a

¹⁰⁹ *Discourses*, I Preface

¹¹⁰ *Mandragola*, Act IV, Scene 2

¹¹¹ *Mandragola*, Act IV, Scene 4

short-term helper, has become a permanent necessity for Callimaco, displacing his long-term servant, Siro¹¹².

Machiavelli's emphasis on dispassionate advisors to the young prince seems, at first, to show him as a harbinger of value-free social science. But while Machiavelli's prudence does not have a moral dimension, it does have an affective one; the tasks set for intelligence are created by the young and passionate and ultimately shaped by the needs of their nature. Any republic contains two diverse humors, that of the multitude and that of the great; the great desire to dominate, and the multitude desires not to be dominated¹¹³.

At the beginning of *Clizia*, Palamede, named for the legendary Greek wise man, flees the play. Intelligence and the city are incompatible unless the intelligent person is willing to engage politically and manage the two diverse humors. Mere wisdom, as shown in Lucrezia, is only useful when it can be led into prudence and recognize the effectual truth. Wisdom is directed to things above the city, but provides little relief from the actual pressures and threats of political life; the Roman Lucretia was compelled take her own life after Sextus Tarquinius raped her. Machiavelli asks us whether Lucrezia's willingness to suffer is reasonable, if the option to take delight in sin is available. Machiavelli makes sin a rational decision, making the intellect the judge of the least bad option among many.

¹¹² Cf. *Mandragola*, Act V, Scene 6; Ligurio asks "Is there no man who remembers Siro?" upon noticing his absence.

¹¹³ *Discourses*, I 4-5

By obscuring the good as an option in itself, he makes available a wider palette of choices. Machiavelli does not encourage evil for its own sake, in contrast with the ancient philosophers who praise good for its own sake. Rather, evil should have its usefulness; that is in part why Giovampagolo Baglioni is blameworthy in Machiavelli's view. He was willing to indulge every vice, commit every sin, but lacked the knowledge of how to apply his wickedness to a deed that would further both the common good and his own¹¹⁴. Unlike Aristotle, who held that the philosopher is able to transcend habituated virtue by understanding the good in itself, Machiavelli turns the intellect to understanding the necessity of vice. Hence, Machiavelli wishes that we should all be tricked as Lucrezia was¹¹⁵.

The Problem of Prudence and Intelligence

Machiavelli recognizes that prudence is dependent upon a general faculty of intelligence that has been unevenly distributed among human beings. Returning to the three classes of brains, the most excellent kind is capable of understanding by itself, the excellent kind is capable of recognizing what others have understood, and the third understands nothing and is useless. How is it that brains can be most excellent, excellent, or useless? One might venture that since the princes to whom Machiavelli writes seem to occupy the second category, the terminology is mere flattery. However, the comparison between the merely excellent brain and the useless one

¹¹⁴ *Discourses*, I 27

¹¹⁵ *Mandragola*, Prologue

reveals the gulf that separates the simple men of the multitude from the great who desire to dominate. The excellent brain is also the one that furnishes the subject matter upon which men with Machiavelli's talents can work; it seems that a prince needs to know enough to get himself into trouble. The classification also provides an interesting contrast with Machiavelli's "two diverse humors"¹¹⁶, because if they are exclusive, one has to wonder how prudent advisors and power can coexist. If the advisor merely wishes not to be dominated, he has no need of being kept good as Machiavelli suggests. Machiavelli thus intimates that the best advisors are those whose minds are fixed on a loftier goal.

Machiavelli uses the words "prudent" and "prudence" in a wide variety of ways. Sometimes prudence appears to be judged entirely by the outcome, as though an accidental choice could be considered prudent because it ends well. Other times, it appears that prudence requires assiduous study and experience to recognize ancient lessons in modern circumstances. It often seems that prudence is a fully creative act, in which the prudent person is able to concoct a scheme that will produce the ends he desires.

We are told that good counsel should arise from the prudence of the prince, and not the prudence of the prince from good counsel¹¹⁷. The prince must be capable of evaluating counsel in terms of the ends and inconveniences it suggests. Insofar as prudence comprises "selecting the less bad as good," one is led to the conclusion that prudence is not itself a creative act. For Machiavellian prudence, it appears to be

¹¹⁶ *Discourses*, I 4-5

¹¹⁷ *Prince*, Ch. XXIII

sufficient to have alternatives laid out, and prudence selects among them to find the less bad option. This implies keeping one's ultimate goal in sight and deliberating about the consequences that may follow, but deliberation does not seem to be absolutely required.

This is aptly illustrated in the *Discourses*, in a chapter entitled "How the Romans Gave Free Commissions to Their Captains of Armies." Machiavelli relays how the Senate wished to keep Fabius from entering into Tuscany, and sent two legates to stop him, unaware that he had already undergone the mission. Finding the battle already won, "instead of being impeters of the war they turned into ambassadors of the acquisition and the glory that was gained."¹¹⁸ Machiavelli tells us "whoever will consider this limit well will see it was used very prudently." The text appears to contradict the title, as it does not seem that the Senate considered Fabius' commission altogether free, and there is the suggestion that Fabius had, in fact, anticipated the Senate's reluctance and concealed his designs. What limit, then, was used prudently, and how is it prudence to commit an error? The limit, it seems, is that the Senate did not expect to make the captains proceed "hand to hand," but rather allowed them to continue until given orders to stop. The prudent ordering is to make an interval between the Senate's pronouncements and the captain's legal requirement to obey, so that a space is provided for bold action. A parallel is found in Book I, chapter 32, which relays how Fabius went to battle against the Samnites against the dictator's command, and how the dictator wanted him executed for it despite his

¹¹⁸ *Discourses*, II 33

success. Machiavelli omits Livy's detail that Papirius "was praising with nearly every other word the deed of Titus Manlius¹¹⁹," i.e., killing his son for engaging in battle against orders¹²⁰.

But it does not appear that the Senate crafted this order in anticipation of similar events. Rather, the prudence seems to be accidental, raising again the question of whether Rome's greatness is due to virtue or accident. As Harvey Mansfield points out, the Senate did not understand itself in Machiavellian terms¹²¹. We must ask ourselves, then, how the institutions are transformed when prudence is intentional, and whence the choices among which prudence might select arise. True choice, as a product of creative ingenuity, appears to be tied to the quality of the brain.

There are three mentions of intelligence directly in the *Discourses*. Two are *intelligenza*, and mean understanding and military intelligence, respectively¹²². The central example occurs in the chapter entitled "Before Great Accidents Occur in a City or in a Province, Signs Come That Forecast Them, or Men Who Predict Them." According to Machiavelli, "no grave accident" ever occurs without presage¹²³. How this occurs is left to someone who has knowledge of things natural and supernatural, which we do not have. However, Machiavelli puts forth a provisional solution: perhaps, as "some philosopher" says, the air is full of intelligences that "foresee things by their natural virtues, and they have compassion for men, they warn them

¹¹⁹ Livy, VIII, 30

¹²⁰ Livy, VIII, 7-8; see discussion in *Discourses*, II 16.1

¹²¹ Cf. Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue*, pg. 253

¹²² *Discourses*, I Preface and II 32

¹²³ *Discourses*, I 56

with like signs so that they can prepare themselves for defense.” The philosopher in question appears to have been Cicero¹²⁴, who uses the word *animorum*, which is the plural genitive of the masculine “soul” or “mind.” The Italian *animi* would have been inapt, as *animo* means “spiritedness” or “mind,” but does not convey the sense of an immortal soul or ghost. Machiavelli assiduously avoids any use of the Italian *anima*, or soul in the *Prince* or the *Discourses*, although the word *pusillanime* occurs in each¹²⁵.

Of all the possible choices, however, Machiavelli has chosen the word *intelligenze*, or “intelligences.” By this choice Machiavelli conveys both the sense of reconnaissance and intellect contained in the other two uses. Just as excellent men in corrupt republics are treated as enemies and disbelieved¹²⁶, these intelligences do not seem to be interpreted correctly or followed. Machiavelli’s final example of the chapter is most telling: a plebeian maintains that he has heard a voice “greater than human” that ordered him to tell the magistrates that the French will invade Rome. Livy tells us that his advice was ignored, leading to Roman disaster¹²⁷. Consider how Ligurio was a beggar and a sponger, and Machiavelli himself a “man of low and mean state” suffering from a “continuous malignity of fortune.¹²⁸” As Leo Strauss points out, Machiavelli opposes the intelligences in the air to Providence or the

¹²⁴ Cicero, *De divinatione*, I 30.64

¹²⁵ Cf. *Discourses* II 32 and *Prince*, Ch. 15 and 19

¹²⁶ *Discourses*, II 22.1

¹²⁷ Livy, V 32

¹²⁸ *Prince*, Dedicatory Letter

intervention of God in human affairs¹²⁹. The intelligences do not directly intervene, nor do they punish or cause human misfortune. Intelligent men like Machiavelli are resigned to a mean state and excluded from politics in such a way that they can only point to the outcome of events as though instructed from omens or portents. The products of intellect do not always have the rhetorical power necessary, of themselves, to become politically salutary. The deed must come first, and then the words to justify it will come. This produces a dilemma for the advisor without a prince who is a prince without a kingdom; he is able to foresee the calamities that will result, but he is not in a position to overtly act.

Intellectual gifts are not distributed by nobility of birth, and so a man with a most excellent brain may be ignored to the prince or republic's peril. The coincidence of high intelligence and power is rare, Machiavelli tells us, so that the institution of entirely new modes and orders would require a man who is both "rare in brain and authority,"¹³⁰ and therefore unlikely. Machiavelli repeatedly asks us to consider how intelligence can be conveyed to the prince, how prudence can become informed, and how we are to know who to believe. The multitude is easily led into error by false promises of great things from eminent men, Machiavelli tells us¹³¹. Yet he seems to contradict himself four chapters later in saying that the multitude is wiser and more constant than a prince¹³², which, if believed, does not bode well for the wisdom or constancy of either. It seems that there are few good and wise princes, and so it is

¹²⁹ Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, pp. 210, 211, 215

¹³⁰ *Discourses*, I 55.5

¹³¹ *Discourses*, I 54

¹³² *Discourses*, I 58

unlikely for power and wisdom to coincide. A multitude, unlike a wicked prince, can be spoken to¹³³. Machiavelli humorously informs us that when a multitude is judging things, provided it hears two orators of “equal virtue,” but who incline to different sides, “very few times does one not see it take up the better opinion.¹³⁴” This is to be opposed to his counsel that “a prudent individual knows many goods that do not have in themselves evident reasons with which one can persuade others¹³⁵,” a difficulty that must be overcome by recourse to God or religion. To maintain a republic and turn it back to its beginnings little by little would require a rare man having enough prudence to see inconveniences from afar, about which he will never convince others¹³⁶.

The role of advisor is not only difficult, but dangerous. The people judges counsel by its results¹³⁷ and the reward of good counsel is outweighed by the danger taken on by the one who gives it when the results are not favorable, so that it is impossible to give advice without knowing every particular of the thing being counseled. One encounters the envy of others who treat one as a threat, whether to reputation, power, or both¹³⁸. To this, one should add the danger of menacing or offending by words, since one makes others cautious around you, and the other inspires hatred¹³⁹. It goes without saying that anything that will lead to bodily harm is

¹³³ *Discourses*, I 58.4

¹³⁴ *Discourses*, I 58.3

¹³⁵ *Discourses*, I 11.3

¹³⁶ *Discourses*, I 18.4

¹³⁷ *Discourses*, III 35.1

¹³⁸ *Discourses*, III 16.1; *Prince*, Ch. 22

¹³⁹ *Discourses*, II 26.1

to be avoided, but the first warning speaks to the necessity of candor. Without access to the thoughts of others, the prudent person can hardly gather the necessary information to counsel; hence Machiavelli calls this advice “one of the great prudences.” Even when the counsel is sound, and the dangers of the enterprise known, one can never be sure that the advice will be followed in the field. One of the great errors is the failure to moderate hopes, so that one who is successful in a first endeavor does not know how to quiet his spirit without engaging in recklessness¹⁴⁰. These dangers arise when one gives counsel openly and boldly, but the moderate course that Machiavelli openly advocates does not seem to comport with his own mode of giving counsel¹⁴¹. Machiavelli’s advice is so moderate in this matter, in fact, that one wonders whether it is better to seek another mode altogether.

The question arises of whether it is better to give counsel or to remain silent. Silence in these matters helps neither prince nor republic, Machiavelli urges, and it does not protect one from the danger¹⁴². Part of this danger may be in the nature of the silent counselor, who is so prideful, like the friend of Perseus, that he cannot remain silent about what he would have said. A notable man cannot even hope to retire and escape the prince’s notice, because the prince will not believe that someone exists who is willing to abstain from dominating and could possibly live otherwise¹⁴³. There seems to be little hope for such a man; even if he measures his forces and overthrows the prince, he is likely to find a state hostile to philosophical rule. By

¹⁴⁰ *Discourses*, II 27.4

¹⁴¹ *Discourses*, III 35.2

¹⁴² *Discourses*, III 35.3

¹⁴³ *Discourses*, III 2

contrast with Plato's *Republic*, in which philosophers rule out of a sense of obligation to the city that raised them, Machiavelli contends that a newly freed state has partisan enemies but no partisan friends¹⁴⁴.

The solution appears to be hidden rule¹⁴⁵, and the solution contains within it the promise of a hidden philosophical rule. Philosophical rule appears to be something entirely new, so that it would require establishing a state anew, or reforming far from its ancient orders. It would be better if such rule could be explicit, but that would require a single prudent individual to complete the task¹⁴⁶. It would be better if one alone could order a state from the beginning, exercising such prudence that it would not need to be reordered or interfered with for a long time¹⁴⁷. In the most desperate times, however, men look to whoever among them is most robust and has greater heart, and obey such a man without any thought to his prudence¹⁴⁸. Even in an existing state, however, it is rare indeed to find someone who is able to recognize inconveniences from far off; so rare that not a single person of such quality might be born in the city¹⁴⁹. Even if he were to be born, it is unlikely that he would be able to convince others of what he understands. The only possible way, it appears, to produce a person of rare brain and authority is in a dyad of advisor and prince. One man commands sufficient authority, the other sufficient brain.

¹⁴⁴ *Discourses*, I 16.4

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Mansfield, *Machiavelli's New Modes and Orders*, pg. 319; Also *Machiavelli's Virtue*, pp. 236-237

¹⁴⁶ *Discourses*, I 9

¹⁴⁷ *Discourses*, I 2.1

¹⁴⁸ *Discourses*, I 2. 3

¹⁴⁹ *Discourses*, I 18.4

The best kind of mind is both needful and impossible to rely on coming into existence. Rarely will an individual of such superiority exist, and if he does exist, he will not have sufficiently long life to guarantee a state its continual freedom. Even the possibility of a line of superior minds that, each in their turn, shape the modes and orders of the state¹⁵⁰ seems impossible to distinguish from accident. We must prudently look for prudence, and that must be done by maximizing the talent available to us. The primary benefit of a republic, it seems, is that it provides the possibility of a churning society¹⁵¹. The benefit of a churning society, in Machiavelli's view, is that it provides youth with an incentive to boldness and disruption.

Summary

In the *Statesman*, young Socrates takes over from Theaetetus after he has been worn out by the Eleatic Stranger's questioning. In the *Art of War*, we see a very different relationship between Fabrizio and his young questioners. Cosimo suggests that as long as Fabrizio does not tire of answering, they will not tire of questioning¹⁵². Cosimo and his friends question Fabrizio, in effect inverting the Socratic method. They question him "without respect" (*sanza rispetto*)¹⁵³ so that they may glean as much information as possible from his experience. Both Harvey Mansfield and Christopher Lynch translate *sanza rispetto* as "without respect," but the phrase has a

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, pp. 129-130

¹⁵¹ *Discourses*, III 9.2

¹⁵² *Art of War*, I 45

¹⁵³ *Art of War*, I 20

fruitful ambiguity in Italian: it also means “without hesitation.” Mansfield’s emphasis on respect helps to underscore Machiavellian themes of social tumult and disregard for traditional authority. These themes are enhanced by always keeping in mind that hesitation and respect are entwined in Machiavelli’s writing. There is something detrimental about overly respecting the roles of the current state; respect leads to delay, and delay is not something one can afford when trying to establish new orders.

Cosimo Rucellai and Zanobi Buondelmonti are Machiavelli’s friends who “for their infinite good parts deserve to be” princes¹⁵⁴, so they are both the audience of the *Discourses* and the interlocutors of the *Art of War*. It is telling that Fabrizio’s dialogue with these young men is about war, a subject that the young are intrigued and energized by. Fabrizio cannot achieve his dream of reviving ancient virtue in military orders himself, but he can pass his project on to those who have the vigor to do so in his stead. Cosimo and his friends question Fabrizio without respect or hesitation, so that they question both the modern captain and his ancient orders. Only after they have satisfied their curiosity, and only after they are satisfied that Fabrizio offers a teaching that itself gives way to necessity and responds without hesitation, can they consider the teaching their own project and carry it the rest of the way.

The problem that Socrates faced with Alcibiades, in its simplest form, is this: what is to be done with a talented, ambitious youth who has means and intends to enter into political life prematurely? Machiavelli acknowledges the difficulty, but his conclusion is very different. Where Socrates counsels patience, Machiavelli would

¹⁵⁴ *Discourses*, Dedicatory Letter

have the philosopher show the youth that he requires the philosopher's experience and intelligence to accomplish his goals. In this way, the philosopher would become a party to the enterprise and see it to a more fruitful end. Given Socrates' ultimate failure to contain Alcibiades, perhaps this approach has merit.

Machiavelli understands that his friends have recognized within him the qualities of a true prince: the knowledge of how to rule. But because Machiavelli himself can never come to power in such a way, nor can his intellectual descendants, he can make use of the young who are both bold and malleable to his designs. A Machiavellian education teaches the necessity of prudence, and it teaches the young to recognize those who have it in greater natural proportions. The young are willing to take on this role, because the prudent will carry them short of the goal, and it seems the most glory is attained by carrying a task to its completion. We could learn from Machiavelli how to make knowledge more accessible to power, but particularly how to make knowledge seem to be in power's best interests. Machiavelli is driven by a natural desire to work "for the common benefit to everyone¹⁵⁵," but even this is an image of benevolence. Machiavelli's success may depend upon transmitting something that is beneficial, but the benefit is his own glory as founder of new modes and orders. In the same way, Machiavelli wants his potential captains to understand the necessity of seeming to benefit others while benefitting themselves. The probability that a long line of such seeming benevolence may create the fact of benefit may seem inconsequential to those who act, but it cannot be overlooked by

¹⁵⁵ *Discourses*, Preface

those who think. Machiavelli has clearly shifted Aristotle's moral practical judgment into a calculating prudence that exists at the service of acquisition. This is one of Machiavelli's great accomplishments: to make nexus of differing ambitions into a common good.

Machiavelli occupies a specific position in a line of thinking about intelligence in Western philosophy: that of drawing intelligence into direct contact with worldly ambition and acquisition. The *Mandragola* and *Clizia* give glimpses of how differing ambitions can be satisfied by an organizing prudence that is able to choose the less bad as good. The person of prudence, however, is a natural type; so Machiavelli instructs us to go in search of such people when our own prudence is insufficient to the task. This is, assumedly, an alternative to destroying such people as rivals. The classical philosophers understood that capable youths were susceptible to ambition. Their solution to this problem is to exhort the young to study philosophy, to withdraw from the visible things to the intelligibles. Machiavelli draws a very different conclusion: youthful ambition cannot be restrained, but it can be managed. His approach suggests something about the nature of a republic, like ours, which has its own ambitions that must be managed.

Chapter 4: Political Psychology and Intelligence

In this chapter, I will introduce the problem of irrationality: that it both influences our scientific endeavors, and that it modifies what we can expect from political leadership. I will discuss the so-called IQ controversy or intelligence debate, in which factions argue for and against the heritability of IQ and its usefulness as a metric of human intelligence. Next, I will introduce depth psychology as a means of understanding the relationship between intelligence and the unconscious mind. I discuss group psychology and its applicability to leadership and the role leaders play in their societies. Finally, I try to apply group psychological concepts to the IQ controversy, with an attempt to find a middle ground for the applicability of intelligence to political life.

When extolling the virtues of rationality and intellect, there is a constant danger of romanticizing and overestimating the extent to which human beings can be strictly rational. The science of intelligence testing is also closely bound with the ideology that preceded it, and this ideology has influenced the scientific interpretation. Alfred Binet, for example, began working on his intelligence test after he became disappointed in craniometry – a pseudoscience with a history of perpetuating racist attitudes. While Alfred Binet did not further these attitudes, intelligence testing attracted interest from the same sorts of people who were looking for a racial science. One must always keep in mind that our scientific notions of intelligence may not be as sterile and unbiased as one might expect. Depth

psychology, as applied to both individuals and groups, provides a helpful starting point for ascertaining the limits of genius in a political context. It is also applicable to helping us understand the failure of intelligence testing to produce a politically viable cognitive elite. No account of the political significance of intelligence would be complete without acknowledging some of the controversies within the contemporary debate on intelligence. This debate is largely couched in psychometric terms in the literature, but it expresses a deep cultural ambivalence to the idea of general intelligence and its political utility. Depth psychology, particularly in its application to groups, provides a lens through which the theorist can understand the debate in terms of unconscious psychological forces. While much of the debate is centered on the heritability of IQ, the political importance of intelligence testing ultimately rests on whether IQ is a useful measure, not the mechanism of the normal distribution in a given population.

The Scientific Theory of Intelligence and the Intelligence Debate

A scientific theory of intelligence did not begin to emerge until Sir Francis Galton published *Hereditary Genius* in 1869. His theory, however, lacked an instrument for testing intelligence, and was instead confined to a description of the theoretical distribution of intelligence in populations. It was not until 1903 that Alfred

Binet published *Experimental Studies of Intelligence* and ushered in the era of intelligence testing¹⁵⁶.

Galton was the first to apply statistical reasoning to the study of intelligence. Galton's thesis was that eminence, or professional success, correlates with intellectual endowments and is heritable. Despite the lack of a formal instrument he believed intelligence to be normally distributed in the same way that height and other human features are¹⁵⁷. He thus divided human intellectual abilities into 16 groups, denoting them g-a to the left of the distribution, and A-G to the right. The tails were labeled x and X, respectively. These classes each represented a standard deviation, such that one out of four people would be found in class A, one out of sixteen in class C, and one out of one million were to be found in class X. Given the absence of any formal test which could quantify these qualities, Galton collected anecdotal evidence and lists of accomplishments for individuals well known in various fields of endeavor.

His approach could hardly be called value-free. Galton wrote *Hereditary Genius* to provide statistical proof for his theory that high achievement runs in families. Comparing intellectual and scholastic achievement with physical strength, Galton surmised that there are natural limits to each man and a law of diminishing returns for efforts¹⁵⁸. He anticipated the argument that hard work may be used to overcome natural limits, admonishing that a blacksmith, no matter how hard he toils,

¹⁵⁶ See John T.E. Richardson, *Howard Andrew Knox: Pioneer of Intelligence Testing at Ellis Island*, Ch. 4, for a brief overview of the early history of intelligence testing, including Binet's contribution.

¹⁵⁷ Sir Francis Galton, *Hereditary Genius*, pg. 18.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22

will find feats beyond his ability that are well within the grasp of even a sedentary natural Hercules. Considering the effects of education on intelligence, he concluded that for those of class G and above, their eminence is assured almost independent of education¹⁵⁹. That is, the level of ability is so high in these natural geniuses that they do not require external assistance to understand the world and thrive.

Galton's hope was to account for how men became distinguished in their respective fields if cases of nepotism or sheer luck are removed. He concluded that there are three requirements: capacity, zeal, and vigor. All three, he argued, were heritable¹⁶⁰. Galton felt that genius was, in fact, general; that is, a person of high capacity was not so restricted that he could only perform with distinction within a single field such as mathematics or literature. Only his passions focused him in a particular direction.

Yet, Galton recognized that there were complicating factors in determining who might be the most eminent individuals in a given field. In literature, for example, men of even mediocre talent may be successful if they narrate to the needs of their times¹⁶¹. On the other hand, works of literary genius may be so well received that the most important sayings or passages are incorporated into everyday speech, or repeated through other writers, such that no one remembers who originally wrote them. Regarding men of science, the fact that discoveries often have rival claimants seems to indicate that the ideas were already ripe; science had already furnished the

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pg. 43

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pg. 75

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pg. 153

necessary materials to arrive at the discoveries. Therefore, being associated with a single great discovery could easily confer undue repute. On the other hand, some of the most important contributions to science may come in the form of criticism and failed experiments, the substance of which are retained in the body of scientific knowledge, though their original authors have become anonymous¹⁶².

Galton's work was inherently political. Possibly the first modern eugenicist, he wished to improve the Anglo-Saxon race's intellectual capabilities by a full class or more. He attempted to disprove the supposed infecundity of able men; if they were less fertile than the general population, this would make his social program impracticable. Further, he argued that, contrary to popular ideas, able men tend to marry able women, i.e., marriages are assortative¹⁶³. He was concerned that the Church discouraged intellectuals from marriage by attracting them to life in the monastery, in which marriage is forbidden, and that this practice was maintained in the universities, which would offer able men a stipend only upon the condition they would not marry. The disparity was enhanced as able men tended to postpone marriage until they had achieved financial stability and ensured their careers, whereas men of lower ability tended to marry earlier. Thus, Galton argued, those of lesser intellectual ability produced offspring earlier, which allowed each successive generation to similarly reproduce earlier, and overwhelm the population geometrically.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, pg. 177

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, pg. 296

Galton believed that professions and society had advanced too far and become too complex; it was thus imperative to raise the average level of ability to survive and grow in these more difficult times¹⁶⁴. He proposed that gifted youths, regardless of their means, should be provided with education; that the path to vocation for young men be quick and smooth; that marriage should be held in high esteem; and that able immigrants should be welcomed to the country¹⁶⁵. But Galton was concerned with the overall intellectual ability of races or nations, and not with the particular use to which the cognitive elite might be put. To be sure, he rests his hopes for the advancement of humanity squarely on the shoulders of men of greater than average intelligence (not necessarily genius), but he seems to believe that intelligence is sufficient unto itself to determine the good. His political prescription, then, is directed toward this overall improvement and leaves each individual to discover his own self-interest.

This concern over national eugenic health was put into a practical program during the moral panic over immigration in the early 20th century¹⁶⁶. Immigrants at Ellis Island were first inspected by physicians by means of line inspection¹⁶⁷, with the intent of identifying “mental deficients.”¹⁶⁸ Since standard intelligence tests, including the Binet scale, could not be administered reliably to immigrants who did not speak English, Howard Andrew Knox developed what is now called a culture-fair

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pg. 311

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pg. 325

¹⁶⁶ Richardson, pg. 73

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 39-42

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pg. 36

test, the Knox Cube Imitation test¹⁶⁹. Ultimately, however, truly culture-fair tests appear to be impossible, since many cultures put less emphasis on the kind of puzzles and games that are traditional in many Western societies. Since performance relies upon motivation, students who are accustomed to being tested tend to perform better. The modern eugenic stance is problematic, in part, because it seeks to exclude people based upon perceived defects rather than make good use of people who are gifted. Modern eugenicists seek to raise the fitness of a people either through breeding programs or by excluding people who are considered poor genetic material. In a sense, a eugenic solution addresses the problem of what is to be done with the most intelligent people: if everyone is more intelligent overall, society can otherwise be left alone. Human beings would still go about their different jobs in society, but all would be more intelligent while doing those jobs. This is, of course, trading what we have for what might be. It is also not an approach our society is willing to entertain in light of our experiences with the iniquities of racism.

Galton's ostensibly sterile, empirical approach to intelligence abandons both the moral qualities of Plato and Aristotle's perspectives, as well as the acquisitive aspect of Machiavelli's. Galton's scientific approach removed intelligence as a political subject and replaced it as a political object: rather than have great minds wrestle with power, power should turn itself toward the productivity afforded by great minds. On the one side, this reflected a sense of confidence that intelligent human

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 111-124; Knox developed other tests, such as the Geographical Puzzle, but the Cube Imitation test was the most popular and enduring. Unfortunately, the test appeared to be more of a test of working memory, which correlates with, but is not identical to, general intelligence.

beings could find their own places in the world; on the other, it encouraged the use of human intelligence as a biological and economic tool.

The Social Relevance of Intelligence

Galton's ideas have been carried forward into the contemporary intelligence debate, often without attribution. Herrnstein and Murray's *The Bell Curve* is *Hereditary Genius*' contemporary heir. Unlike Galton, Herrnstein and Murray had benefit of the 1979 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, which allowed them to compare educational and economic outcomes with IQ, as well as decades' worth of psychometric research. Like Galton, Herrnstein and Murray argue that intelligence has broad and important social effects that should lead to important policy considerations.

It is widely accepted among psychologists that higher values of *g*, or general intelligence, translate on average into higher job performance¹⁷⁰. Herrnstein and Murray make much of the fact that this result holds true regardless of the job; whether the person elects to become a busboy or an executive, they will perform better on average given a higher IQ. Significant differences in performance remain even after long-term training in a job. The authors use this result to argue that being able to

¹⁷⁰ Schmidt, Frank L; Hunter, John, "General Mental Ability in the World of Work: Occupational Attainment and Job Performance"

select employees based on IQ or standardized tests leads to greater efficiency in the economy. Intelligence, they argue, has market value, and employers increasingly use a variety of proxies in an attempt to select the most intelligent employees they can. Since IQ is fundamentally related to productivity, employers are highly motivated to hire the most productive employees they can find¹⁷¹.

However, Herrnstein and Murray point out that the correlation of job performance with IQ is not very strong *within* particular occupations. This is due to the statistical issue of restriction of range. For example, weight is not a good predictor of a linebacker's performance if we choose from the population of people who are already selected to be linebackers. However, if we were faced with the task of choosing from a pool of candidates representative of the general population, choosing based on weight would be highly correlated with performance. The same issue arises within occupations: certain forces act to filter candidates for any position. Lawyers cannot become employed without first having to have been accepted to a university, and then to a law school, and then passing the state bar. Each criterion tends to select based on IQ, so lawyers as a group have a much more restricted range of IQs than the population at large.

The authors provide a further caveat: modest correlations mean many exceptions. Thus, they are careful to point out that we can only talk in terms of statistical selection. If an employer is faced with filling many open positions, and has IQ scores available to him, choosing candidates based on IQ will give him better

¹⁷¹ Herrnstein; Murray, *The Bell Curve*, pg. 64

results on average. Certainly, there will be some new employees who will perform poorly despite high IQ, and lower-IQ candidates who would've performed well but were not hired. Still, they argue, intelligence tests are better predictors than narrow occupational tests or interviewer assessment¹⁷².

Herrnstein and Murray are concerned with a phenomenon they term “cognitive partitioning”¹⁷³. They argue that certain forces are causing a high-IQ/low-IQ divide, which serves to separate the higher-IQ members of society and insulate them from the conditions in which the cognitively less fortunate must live. They propose a central irony in egalitarianism: uniform opportunity increases the heritability of traits. That is, the more environmental conditions are equalized across socio-economic boundaries, the more the variation in IQ (or any other trait) will be attributed to heredity¹⁷⁴. They argue, just as Galton did, that marriages are becoming increasingly assortative. Partly, this is due to the ways in which people tend to be funneled into particular industries and jobs based upon mental ability. Increasingly, however, they argue that the information economy produces entire sectors of business which do not contain a representative sample of the population. They contend that factories, at one point, employed laborers as well as engineers, and allowed some degree of commingling and therefore marriage between so-called cognitive classes¹⁷⁵.

The result is that rather than having what they term a “churning” society, in which the elite may (and do) rise from every class, we will increasingly have a caste

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, pg. 70

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, pg. 91

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pg. 106

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pg. 108

society, in which the elite are born of the elite, and social and economic mobility will become extinct¹⁷⁶. They point out that according to the NLSY, only six percent of persons in the top five centiles of IQ did not have a college degree and came from families in the lower half of socioeconomic status. This, they argue, disproves the notion that there are many highly intelligent people in the lower classes who are not afforded the opportunity for a good education. In fact, they argue that our current social systems are very efficient at identifying talent at a young age and funneling that talent into college and post-graduate work¹⁷⁷.

Herrnstein and Murray give a litany of social ills which they believe can be traced back to low IQ. For instance, according to the cited statistics, poverty is caused by IQ rather than the inverse¹⁷⁸. Their seemingly benign argument is that a policy response should take this into account, as IQ is fixed, and if poverty is highly correlated with IQ, one can hardly blame individuals for an inborn trait¹⁷⁹. They go on to show that as IQ goes down, unemployment figures and disability rates go up. Risk factors for divorce¹⁸⁰ and the likelihood of engaging in criminal behavior are inversely correlated with IQ¹⁸¹. They point out that if we compare the rate of

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pg. 113

¹⁷⁷ Young's *Rise of the Meritocracy* goes into some detail about how an efficient selection based on IQ could be implemented, including optional re-tests for those who felt they did not perform to their potential, and free continuing education for adults so that they could continue to develop their minds (pp. 64-66). Ultimately, Young arrives at the conclusion that, almost exclusively, bright parents have bright children, dull parents have dull children, and there is little need for churning (pg. 166).

¹⁷⁸ *The Bell Curve*, pg. 130

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pg. 142

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pg. 177

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pg. 241

conviction with the number of reported crimes, it is mathematically impossible that there be a highly intelligent population of criminals who are simply too clever to be caught; a somewhat naïve argument in the light of recent high-profile economic swindles perpetrated by well-educated elites.

Ultimately, however, the authors are most concerned with the possibility that the overall IQ distribution of the country is falling¹⁸². They point out that small changes in the mean IQ have disproportionate impact on the tails of a normal curve¹⁸³. Moreover, they argue that while it does not seem possible to raise IQ with better education or ‘head start’ programs, it is actually possible to depress IQ in gifted children by lowering the standards of education¹⁸⁴. As this is the most politically involved class¹⁸⁵, as well as the group of individuals best suited to solve the problems of the future, Herrnstein and Murray argue that money should be diverted from remedial education programs and more focus should be placed on educating the most talented youth. Thus, the ideal of the “educated man” should once again be restored to a place of prominence¹⁸⁶.

Unfortunately, this scientific, rudderless version of intelligence is treated as a good in itself, rather than having a particular social, political, or moral utility. For Aristotle, intelligence was a means through which one could engage in the contemplative life. In a lower form, the various kinds of intelligence help to make up

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, Ch. 15

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, pg. 365

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 432-433

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pg. 261

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pg. 444

practical judgment, and therefore have political utility. The way Galton, Herrnstein, and Murray frame the discussion, it might be better to ask whether so-called progress is the enemy. That is, if scientific and social progress continually increases the cognitive load across all of society, and therefore makes it progressively more difficult to live as a person of ordinary intelligence, perhaps our institutions are to blame. If all of our buildings were built so that only people who were above average in height could efficiently make use of them, we would find fault with the architects.

Along the same vein, they lament that affirmative action programs have ensured that education can no longer be considered a reliable proxy for intelligence or competence when employers look to hire minorities¹⁸⁷. Further, as the disparity increases between the cognitive classes, they believe that a custodial state will emerge, which will have to become increasingly centralized and intrusive¹⁸⁸. Such a state would arise as a natural consequence to the burgeoning cognitive underclass, which would be incapable of thriving without direct intervention by the state. Instead, Herrnstein and Murray argue, we should return to the American ideal of individualism¹⁸⁹, and try to recapture the kinds of mixed, cognitively heterogeneous communities we once enjoyed. In such communities, every person can find a useful and productive place and can be accepted, regardless of his or her cognitive level;

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pg. 503

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pg. 523

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pg. 550

government at the local or community level provides much better for the range of intellectual abilities¹⁹⁰.

The Intelligence Debate

The Bell Curve has been widely decried in the press and by popular authors¹⁹¹. Two of the best-known critics are Stephen J. Gould and Malcolm Gladwell. Gould's *The Mismeasure of Man* begins from the premise that there are four basic errors in philosophy and science: reductionism, reification, dichotomization or Manichaeism, and hierarchy. His goal is to show that these errors permeate the history of psychometrics, and therefore taint the conclusions that successive generations of psychologists have drawn from psychometric testing.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pg. 540

¹⁹¹ Leon J. Kamin's *Science and Politics of I.Q.* predates *The Bell Curve* and is one of the first in-depth criticisms of hereditarian interpretations of intelligence tests. Kamin laments that "academic seekers after truth pursue jointly the goals of scientific and political wisdom" (pg. 28), which is to say they allow ideology to taint the science. Kamin is commonly cited in the literature, but infrequently argued with. On the one hand, he was one of the first to speak up for immigrants and minorities who suffered from the idea that inheritance was intellectual destiny. On the other, his argument is narrowly directed to the evidence available in 1974, which is very out of date. He does criticize the cultural and social biases of intelligence tests (pp. 175-178), but these particular arguments no longer apply to modern tests.

Gould notes that Binet's original tests were designed in response to a 1904 commission, the goal of which was to identify students in need of special education¹⁹². Binet's test followed years of disappointing results in craniometry, which attempted to correlate intelligence with the size of the skull. In its original form, Gould contends, the Binet test was benign; a series of tests which could identify weaknesses or educational disabilities and could be used to help students ultimately succeed.

Charles Spearman, however, posited that IQ tests actually measured a single quantity, *g* (general intelligence), more or less perfectly. The more accurate the test, the more perfectly it correlated with *g*. Gould argues that *g* is no more than a mathematical artifact; something like the average of a variety of tests that each measures something individual. But the *g* concept tapped directly into inveterate, racist ideas which sought a single measure for comparing individuals and races. With craniometry a failure, *g* was its natural successor. These scientists further fell prey to the logical error of hierarchy, as they wished to categorize human beings based upon a single number. Ultimately, Gould says, the goal was to compare individuals via this single number, *g*, and to further compare racial groups to show the superiority of one to another.

Even if *g* were to have independent reality, Gould argues that heritability is not equal to inevitability. Even though IQ has been shown to be highly heritable, there may be other factors that could influence IQ beyond simple genetics.

¹⁹² Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, pg. 179

Heritability is only the measure how much variation exists in a population for a given characteristic, controlling for environmental effects. He points out that if all members of a population are exposed to the same environment (food and water sources, air, housing materials, and so on), all variation will be due to heredity.

As such, Gould argues that even scientists confuse within and between group heritability. He gives the example of a tribe of very tall (or short) people. If each member of the tribe is exposed to the same environment, all variation between those individuals will be due to heredity. However, this does not exclude the possibility of a pervasive environmental influence that could account for a greater or lesser average height than seen in other populations. Therefore, one cannot conclude that the difference between the tribe's average height and the average height of any other population is due to heritable differences (genetics).

Ultimately, however, Gould's argument flounders because his greatest objection to g as a concept is that psychometricians use it as a measure of 'mental worth'. From that perspective, certainly, it is easy to conclude that g , for all its mathematical ambiguity, is a faulty measure. But that argument ignores the statistical features of g that make it attractive. For instance, one could measure the average running times of athletes under various conditions (sprints, endurance running, uphill, etc). Such an average running time would not, of course, correspond to any 'real' value. It would mask that a particular runner was well suited to sprinting but performed poorly over long distances. At the same time, however, such a number would allow us to compare a variety of runners to each other to determine something like *overall* running ability. If one had a specific task one needed a runner for, it

would only make sense to consult the individual scores that corresponded to the particular task. But if the specific conditions of the run are unknown, and we have no other information on which to form an assessment, it is only reasonable that one would have greater success, on average, by picking runners having the best overall score. The same logic applies for IQ. Still, Gould's point stands that there is no excuse for arguing for the superiority of one race over another based upon *g* or any other measure.

In *Outliers*, Malcolm Gladwell argues that IQ is simply not relevant to success. He does not argue, as Gould does, that *g* or IQ are fundamentally flawed measures, or rooted in racist ideology. Rather, he wants to show that while IQ may help in certain limited situations, success is largely due to factors within human control.

Gladwell attacks the supposition that we live in anything resembling a meritocracy. Everyone does not, he argues, have access to the machinery of success¹⁹³. Rather, "people don't rise from nothing."¹⁹⁴ It isn't what people are "like," but where they are from that matters. He argues that despite the persistent myth of the self-made man, individuals who appear to make their own ways in life are actually the beneficiaries of a wide range of social and institutional biases which grease the path to success. A prime example is the relative age of hockey players. In Canada, he argues, a very large percentage of the population plays hockey, beginning at a young age. The best in each division are gradually filtered up through the ranks

¹⁹³ Gladwell, *Outliers*, Ch. 1, Sec. 1

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, Ch. 1, Sec. 2

until they reach professional status. But Gladwell asserts that if we look at the rankings of these young players, it is almost always the oldest players from a given league who are ranked the highest. Because size correlates highly with relative ability at this level, and because there are large size differences in young children separated by even a few months, players who are older (just young enough to have been born before the cutoff birth date) are given preferential treatment. They perform the best, and therefore are given additional coaching and promoted through the ranks. The younger players, he argues, never have a chance. Gladwell argues that this occurs in all areas of achievement, and that small differences in ability early in life create self-fulfilling prophecies. Small differences turn into large ones.

Gladwell maintains that there is a 10,000 hour “rule” with regard to ability in any endeavor that requires substantial skill. The specific example he gives is from K.A. Ericsson’s 1993 study of musicians in music school. Gladwell interprets the study to mean that players achieve virtuoso status by virtue of the number of hours spent practicing, and that 10,000 hours is the “magic number.”¹⁹⁵ Gladwell insists that there were no “naturals” (students who performed at elite levels without investing as much time) or “grinds” (students who worked as hard as or harder than other students but could not reach the same level of ability) found in the study¹⁹⁶.

¹⁹⁵ Ericsson published a rebuttal, “The Danger of Delegating Education to Journalists” (2012), in which he argues that the 10,000 hour rule was “invented by Malcolm Gladwell” (pg. 3); his actual data suggests that some of the best violinists differentiate themselves much earlier than 10,000 hours.

¹⁹⁶ In contrast, Gladwell maintains in a recent BBC article that “I think that being very, very good at something requires a big healthy dose of natural talent”, see Ben

He then goes on to describe the “trouble with geniuses,” in which he gives a sketch of Lewis Terman’s famous 1921 study of high IQ youths throughout their lives. Gladwell points out that a large number of these young geniuses performed significantly below expectations as the study wore on. The narrative centerpiece of the argument is Christopher Langan, reportedly the smartest man in America, with an IQ greater than 200. Gladwell compares Langan to Robert Oppenheimer, in an attempt to explain Langan’s failure to thrive in a university context. His conclusion is that “practical intelligence,” which he intends to mean something like social intelligence, is a critical component of success¹⁹⁷. He argues that IQ may simply be a measure of how well an individual can solve certain kinds of puzzles, whereas he believes social intelligence can be taught. Children therefore need a community around them that prepares them for the world¹⁹⁸.

Gladwell then constructs a profile of successful lawyers. He argues that coincidences in the early 20th century made it possible for immigrants to become very successful in the nascent garment industry. Jewish immigrants were particularly favored because of the skills they were likely to have acquired in their home countries. As a result, these families were able to become financially successful, and the sons of men in the garment trade tended to become doctors or lawyers. However, prejudice in larger, “white shoe” law firms prevented them from hiring Jewish attorneys, who were forced to take jobs in firms that accepted whatever kind of work

Carter, “Can 10,000 hours of practice make you an expert?”, *BBC News*,
<http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-26384712>

¹⁹⁷ *Outliers*, pp. 100-101

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pg. 112

was available. The white shoe firms' disdain for hostile corporate takeovers meant that these smaller firms were able to take the lion's share of the corporate "dirty work" that became increasingly lucrative and central to business interests. Therefore, these Jewish lawyers prospered disproportionately as a result of a series of unlikely events.

Gladwell then takes on cultural issues, arguing that the particular work ethic required to thrive in an economy driven by rice production (as in Southern China) teaches the kinds of qualities necessary to do well in mathematics and the sciences. He argues that a longer school year is not the cause of Asian superiority in math, but rather the effect of a work ethic that prizes year-round diligence¹⁹⁹.

Thus, Gladwell argues that the onus on society is to produce opportunities²⁰⁰. Inequities may not be intentional and they may not be rooted in racism or evil intentions, but they still must be eliminated in order to avoid unduly punishing children for mere historical accidents. Unfortunately, Gladwell does not provide any specific program for achieving this end, nor does he provide an analysis of the economics of such an arrangement.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pg. 260

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pg. 268

Depth Psychology and the Limits of Intelligence

What can depth psychology and psychoanalytic insights provide in this debate? Sigmund Freud's theories are applicable for understanding both the limits of rationality and human intelligence in individuals as well as how we, as large and small groups, interact with and understand high intelligence. The individual person is limited not just by his cognitive power, but by the matrix of phantasy out of which so many of our biases are formed. The group cannot help but project phantasies onto any elite with which it is presented.

In the *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Freud mentions intelligence or genius a mere handful of times. In almost every case, the reason for mentioning intelligence is to point out that the patients under discussion are more intelligent and educated than the average person. The term is often a predicate of a patient: “[a] man, whom I can only describe as of the highest intelligence,²⁰¹” which we ought to read as “a man, whom I can only describe as *otherwise* of the highest intelligence.” Freud doesn't deny rationality, of course – the application of *logos* to the desires of the id and the strictures of the superego forms the basis of Freudian psychoanalytic technique. But his patients' neuroses were not due to a lack of intelligence, and rather to unconscious conflicts that seemed somehow *other* than the intelligence one could apply in one's daily life. So alien were these forces, in fact, that one had to employ a specially trained intelligence before they were more than blind spots to the ego's reality-testing apparatus. Freud does not want us to mistake his theories as applying

²⁰¹ Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, pg. 357

only to the feeble-minded or the pathological. He goes so far as to say that “a certain amount of intellectual capacity is naturally required in our patients.”²⁰²

Freud, however, did not leave us with a theory of human intelligence. Despite being aware of both Sir Francis Galton²⁰³ and Alfred Binet²⁰⁴, he seemed uninterested in intelligence testing. Rather, from his vantage, it seems “men cannot be guided through their intelligence, they are ruled by their passions and their instinctual demands.”²⁰⁵ We are left to reconstruct the relationship of general intelligence to the rest of the psyche.

General intelligence is not identical with rationality. To the extent that IQ tests measure an inborn trait, general intelligence must be related to physical properties of the brain that facilitate or hamper cognition. But even high intelligence and cognitive sophistication do not seem to attenuate the effects of cognitive biases – they may even make the effects worse²⁰⁶. *G* may be thought of, conceptually, in the same sort of terms that Freud spoke about libido: as a kind of psychical energy that is attached to different objects. Like Freud, one must always keep in mind that such terms are abstractions, and do not necessarily reflect the underlying physical structure of the brain. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note the analogues. Raymond Cattell, for example, identified the concepts of crystallized (*Gc*) and fluid (*Gf*) intelligence. While crystallized intelligence is not merely a “crystallized” form of fluid

²⁰² *Ibid.*, pg. 546

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, pg. 211, note 3

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pg. 432

²⁰⁵ Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, IX

²⁰⁶ West RF; Meserve RJ; Stanovich KE, “Cognitive sophistication does not attenuate the bias blind spot”

intelligence, it reflects the cognitive investment one has made throughout one's life. Freud might say that crystallized intelligence represents the particular intellectual objects with which the ego has cathected. For Cattell, fluid intelligence represents the neural efficiency of the subject as opposed to the particular knowledge and skills he or she has gained and invested his intellect in over time.

If the neural efficiency model is accurate, then the entire brain is likely influenced by its effects; even the workings of the id would be able to make use of intelligence though not rationality. Freud points out difficult intellectual problems can be solved preconsciously²⁰⁷ and that dream thoughts may themselves perform intellectual operations²⁰⁸. In *Leonardo da Vinci, A Memory of his Childhood*, Freud argues that childhood sexual researches are the infantile antecedents of adult scientific and artistic work. Even in the case of sublimation, intellect is determined by psychosexual development. That early experiences shape and mold one's adult work output is hardly surprising in artistic endeavors, but less readily accepted as the impetus behind scientific investigation. Our intellectual horizons seem to be circumscribed by our sexual phantasies.

One note on terminology: Paul Hoggett argues that it is incorrect to label unconscious feelings as irrational because they have their own internal logic (what he calls psycho-logic)²⁰⁹. Hoggett's argument appears somewhat flawed: logic is a kind of *logos*, or speech; Hoggett blurs the line between step-by-step reasoning and

²⁰⁷ Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, pg.20

²⁰⁸ Freud, *On Dreams*, pp. 50-51

²⁰⁹ Hoggett, *Politics, Identity, and Emotion*, pg. viii

general problem solving. If we accept Freud's account of psychodynamic processes, however, Hoggett is surely correct that the word "irrational" may be taken as condescending or dismissive. However, there does not seem to be a good alternative for distinguishing between psycho-logic and a formal rationality that is free of, or aims to be free of, cognitive biases and logical errors. Hoggett also does not distinguish between rationality and intelligence, which my argument maintains as interdependent but conceptually separate faculties. Hoggett argues for a threefold distinction between rational, irrational, and nonrational, with the nonrational being the site of, for example, imagined identities. Such a distinction is particularly useful when discussing groups in conflict, but less so when interpreting groups in the abstract.

In the same spirit that Sylvia Nasar called schizophrenia a "ratiocinating illness," the term "irrational" is here used as "otherwise rational," or simply to distinguish affective modes of thinking from formally rational thinking²¹⁰. Of course, much like a true vacuum, pure rationality may not exist or sustain itself for very long; after all, the id and the ego do not have sharp edges delineating them. The fact that pure rationality is tenuous, however, points to the importance of acknowledging those factors that make it so. Thinking about an intelligent id anthropologically, as Freud would, puts the problem into clearer perspective. Unconscious phantasies represent a kind of reasoning, even if this reasoning seems alien to our formal rationality. The id is not merely the repository of instinctual urges that must be mediated by the ego, but

²¹⁰ Cf Roazen, *Freud: Political & Social Thought*, pp. 129-130

also the seat of unconscious conflicts. This is vividly expressed in Melanie Klein's object relations theory, in which unconscious phantasies about introjected objects are continually elaborated.

To understand the role of intelligence and the psychodynamic model, it is helpful to turn to Freud's *The Ego and the Id*. Here Freud lays out his topographic model of the psyche, dividing it into the unconscious, preconscious, and conscious. Our own daily experiences with thinking should be enough to convince us that not everything that can be conscious *is* conscious at any given time. We have limited attention. Freud identifies these thoughts as being unconscious descriptively, though latent, as opposed to those thoughts that are unconscious dynamically and repressed. The ego is formed out of the id under the influence and pressure of sense perceptions. The ego is responsible for the critical function of reality-testing, in which our phantasies or ideas are tested against the world as it is; it represents reason and common sense, while the id is representative of the passions. The ego is in relation to the id like a man on horseback (here Freud seems to recall the image of the soul as a charioteer driving two horses from Plato's *Phaedrus*), sometimes controlling the destination, sometimes being forced to navigate the way the id wants to go. But the ego is, first and foremost, a bodily ego; that is, it represents the boundaries of the self, against which it differentiates the reality to which it must yield. While this description might give the ego the appearance of a scientific faculty, one must keep in mind that the ego serves three masters: the id, *Ananke*, and the superego²¹¹. It is responsible for

²¹¹ Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, pp. 96-97

managing the discharge of the id's libidinal urges without allowing the organism to be destroyed in the execution, as well as for following the strictures of the conscience.

The ego is not, therefore, put in a position where it can be fully rational. In fact, the earliest psychical conflicts provide the basis for the ego's response to libidinal demands. When a person is forced to give up a sex object, he sets the object up in the ego; this is perhaps the sole condition under which the id can give up its objects, according to Freud²¹². The ego identifies with the lost object, and transforms libido into desexualized, narcissistic libido; the ego asks the id to love it as it would have loved the object, for it has made itself like the object through identification. The prototypical identification is with the father, but the complete Oedipus Complex is complicated by bisexuality. In fact, the boy behaves in a feminine way toward his father, and resents his mother for stealing his fathers' affections. The precipitate of the abandoned object cathexes is deposited in the ego, and the two identifications become combined, transforming into the superego. The superego demands the ego to conform to the ego-ideal, but the root of the Oedipal conflict is exactly in trying to usurp the role of the father, on whom the ego-ideal is based. The mandate of the superego is thus that the ego ought to be like the father, but must not be like him.

The ego is caught between the irrational, conflicting, and ceaseless demands of the id and the superego. As such, we utilize our intelligence often to satisfy impulses and rules that do not have a rational basis themselves. As Hoggett points out, we use our feelings, emotions, and values to think; it is the id that chooses the

²¹² Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, pg. 24

objects the ego uses intelligence to acquire or substitute for²¹³. This paints a dim view of the possibility for intelligent, philosophical rule. As Freud says, in psychology “mankind’s constitutional unfitnes for scientific research comes fully into the open.”²¹⁴ Our egos are not constitutionally suited toward sustained, serious thought: “resistance stirs within us against the relentlessness and monotony of the laws of thought and against the demands of reality-testing. Reason becomes the enemy which withholds from us so many possibilities of pleasure.”²¹⁵

Freud seems to place hard limits on what we can expect from even the most enlightened leaders. From an individual psychology perspective, expressing intelligence as rationality is limited in two ways. First, the motivations, objects, and affects that inform our decision-making are not themselves founded rationally. The work left for rational thought and intelligence may end up being the mere achievement of particular ends, an instrumental rationality. Second, we do not have unlimited reserves of the discipline and willpower necessary to sustain serious thought, so that even if our ends are well chosen, we are subject to something like what current literature often calls “ego depletion.” As such, we cannot depend on a cognitive elite to be fully rational by nature. Intellectual virtue may be as much a matter of habituation as is moral virtue, and one’s individual intelligence cannot be trusted to always disclose truth, no matter how assiduously logic is applied. The fallibility and incompleteness of our own intellectual processes is why Aristotle wrote

²¹³ Hoggett, *Politics, Identity, and Emotion*, pg. 177

²¹⁴ Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, pg. 6

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pg. 41

that the wise person “will contemplate better, no doubt, when he has people to work with,²¹⁶” even if he contemplates well alone.

The Position of the Group in Relation to Intelligence

Groups, too, are subject to the influence of unconscious forces and phantasies. If intelligent, philosophical rule is to be possible in a democratic republic, two key questions must be answered. First, can large groups behave intelligently, or at least recognize intelligent leadership when it appears? Second: do the phantasies that emerge in the group render intelligent leadership impossible per se?

The idea of a “mob mentality” is no less common today than it was when Gustave Le Bon wrote *The Crowd – A Study of the Popular Mind*. Le Bon discussed his “collective mind” in much more literal terms than most of us would admit to: a collective mentality through which members of a crowd think, feel, and act differently from themselves. If Le Bon is correct, of course, the political is hopelessly unintelligent. Le Bon argues that there is a fundamental shift in perception, affect, and cognitive ability; crowds are always intellectually inferior to individuals, he argues, though in terms of feelings or acts they may be better or worse than the individuals comprising the crowd.

Because crowds only “think in images” for Le Bon - here we may recall Freud’s point in *The Ego and the Id* that thinking in images is an older, less developed form of thinking than using word representations - crowds are liable to

²¹⁶ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1177b1

confuse associations between thoughts; false associations cause the crowd to link unrelated images and thus arrive at incorrect conclusions based upon those associations. It is understandable, then, that the crowd does not crave reasoned discourse or a rational assessment of ability when choosing its leaders. Rather, it longs for legendary heroes, demigods who are represented through mythological imagery, reaching to the root of the race's archaic past. Orators who wish to lead the crowd, Le Bon tells us, must exaggerate, repeat, affirm, and never attempt to use reason. Crucially, the leader for Le Bon always stands on soft ground; his position is entirely contingent on the whim of the crowd and is only secure when his legacy has passed into myth. There is no objective indicium of competence that can be relied upon, in Le Bon's view, to safeguard rule or placate an angry mob.

Le Bon's characterization is better seen as a particular manifestation of group psychology, rather than the general rule. In *Experiences in Groups and Other Papers*, Wilfred Bion extended Melanie Klein's concept of psychological positions to the group setting, calling them "basic assumptions." He suggested that a group may pick its sickest member as a leader under the influence of the basic assumption of dependence - the group seeks a leader who is as dependent on the group as the group is dependent upon him. Witness, Bion says, the pharaohs in Egypt whose monuments could be seen as a kind of group therapy, with the people tending to the pharaoh's anxiety²¹⁷. C. Fred Alford points out that a less subtle explanation is that the more extreme paranoid-schizoid leader provides a better holding function for the group,

²¹⁷ Bion, *Experiences in Groups: and Other Papers*, pg. 120

and is more practiced in imaginatively communicating anxiety²¹⁸. Either interpretation allows for the development of groups with unhealthy, tenuous relations with their leaders, without generalizing the pathological situation.

Freud begins *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* by examining Le Bon, but quickly dismisses the notion of an independent group mind. In contrast with Le Bon's romantic individualism, Freud argues that individual psychology almost always involves other people, whether they be family members, friends, or acquaintances; our psychology is primarily a relational one, which is overwhelmingly concerned with objects and relationships between people²¹⁹. It is possible to view Freud's dismissal as applying merely to a theory in which a group mind exists, to some extent, separately from the group itself. But even if we construe the group mind more narrowly as a regressed or separate psychological state in which all members individually participate, Freud argues that group processes are fundamentally related to the same psychological states that dominate both quotidian and neurotic behavior. That is, even if there is a state such as a regressed group, its etiology is found in the individual psychology of each of the members, and is strictly continuous with that psychology.

The members of the group are bound through libidinal ties which recall the same libidinal cathexes one sees in siblings; a kind of mutual love founded on initial hostility, and the commandment that no individual should receive more love from the leader or authority than others. This, for Freud, is the foundation of the social

²¹⁸ Alford, *Melanie Klein and Critical Social Theory*, pg. 73

²¹⁹ Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, pg. 3

contract, which recapitulates the formation of bands of brothers before the murder of the primal father, and their struggle afterward to return to patriarchal order. Members of the group identify with the authority figure, who, to some extent, supplants the ego ideal in the psyche. Of course, as Paul Roazen points out, the superego is not entirely replaced by the image of the leader²²⁰; the leader's contributions are more like accretions that function alongside existing superego dictates. As such, atrocity and guilt become powerful means of maintaining cohesion in the group; the leader commands the led to participate in violence which inspires guilt, and therefore fears of reprisal. The group then clings more tightly to the leader to protect them from their projected guilt.

But groups are not necessarily, or even ordinarily, pathological. Freud argues that even the group is capable of expressing creative genius, a fact which is evinced by language and rain dances. For Freud, at least at the time he wrote *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, it was an open question how much the individual merely perfects the work of the group or culture. This question had consequences for the kind of leader the group could choose: similar to Le Bon, Freud held that the leader had to have certain typical qualities that potential group members could recognize and identify with. This identification with the leader is the most important step in establishing his hold on the people, and the rest of the group congeals out of a natural desire to attain harmony with the group.

²²⁰ Roazen, *Freud: Political & Social Thought*, pg. 239

But Freud approaches the problem from a different angle when he writes *Moses and Monotheism*. While Freud begins the work by asking whether the historical Moses even existed, the rest of the work is clearly written under the assumption that he did; that great men actually have existed in the past and have profoundly influenced their cultures. Here we see the most dramatic break with Le Bon's theory of influencing cultural attitudes. Freud acknowledges the capacity to directly and profoundly influence the beliefs of a people. Specifically, Freud argues that Moses was actually an Egyptian who served in the court of Amenhotep IV and embraced Amenhotep's radical new monotheism. This monotheistic idea was a profound innovation, Freud says, and it was only able to arise out of a culture of empire; still, it was not accepted by the majority of Egyptians, and people who clung to the new idea were forced to flee. Moses imposed the new religion on the Israelites, but they eventually rebelled and killed him. Freud's next argument is striking: later on, the Israelites took on a new religion imparted by a Midianite priest - the worship of Jahve. But they attributed many of the qualities of the first Moses onto their new god, and conflated the Midianite priest's legacy with that of the original Moses. In short, the new religion which the Israelites developed was the return of the repressed.

It is true that such a return had, as its precondition, a similarity with the killing of the primal father as Freud relates in *Totem and Taboo*. But Moses' profound influence on the Jewish culture came in the form of a cultural trauma, which Freud says not only influenced culture, but genetically changed their psyches as well, transmitting a collective memory of their crime through the generations, even without the use of tradition. Mass psychology becomes similar to personal psychology: new

truths conflict with deeply held wishes, and it is only after time that the ego is able to accept them as true, but painful. He thus relates traumatic events in civilization to traumatic neurosis and the latency period; in a “compromise period” of the culture’s progress, a difference shows between the written account and the oral report or tradition. Once forgotten truths, having ascended to consciousness, have a powerful force that bypasses logic and seizes the imagination. And, in fact, the once dangerous idea becomes the people’s most treasured possession.

Freud goes still further to address the question of great men in history. He says “it was one man, the man Moses, who created the Jews.²²¹” From there, he begins to discuss the great man theory itself. He is willing to grant that a man can develop such extreme effectiveness that “he can create out of indifferent individuals and families one people, can stamp this people with its definite character and determine its fate for millennia to come.” To be sure, Freud agrees that one cannot discount impersonal factors such as economic circumstances, immigration, and so on. But historical events are like individual psychology in a further regard: they tend to be over-determined. Freud lacks any sentimentalism toward great men; the hero is a tragic figure for Freud, doomed to be destroyed by the people he would lead. He may set the course of a civilization, but it is only after he has been rent apart and cannibalized that he obtains his mythic status.

As such, one cannot forget that humanity’s formative moment was, in Freud’s view, the murder of the primal father by a band of brothers desperate to escape his

²²¹ Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, pg. 136

despotism. This murder had such a profound impact on humanity, Freud tells us, that it established the very basis of religion and civilization. Herbert Marcuse's perspective on this primal murder teaches us something else: the act of despotism was itself a voluntary act on the part of the primal father. While civilization has been conditioned on domination - continual recapitulations of the original murder - the act itself was historically contingent for Freud, and so domination itself is historically contingent. Marcuse wants us to believe that a new form of freedom is possible, new modes of being which radically alter our psyches in the same way that they currently bear the imprimatur of the primal father - via the Oedipus complex, totemism, and religion. To be fair, Marcuse does not expect a messiah. But an acceptance of Freud's premise leaves open the possibility of individuals who can transform civilization into something that has never been seen before.

Freud's account shows us that what we might regard as objective criteria for leadership are not by themselves sufficient; the great leader has to tap into the imagination of the people he leads, and to do so means resonating with their fears and hopes. One cannot, therefore, merely select the most intelligent and educated people as leaders, unless that selection is itself already imbued with the kind of affective power that would allow those people to lead. Once in leadership positions, they would need to be able to address problems, both real and imagined.

In *Group*, Claudio Neri presents an argument that fits well with Freud's, while borrowing heavily from Bion. Neri argues that group life is a distinct process from individual life. That is not to say that Neri posits a group or collective mind, but he acknowledges that the way we interact with others changes in functional aspects from

how we are when we are alone, or indeed when we are in a different kind of group. The group has a particular way of working through problems that makes it amenable to solving certain kinds of issues. Neri's account never loses sight of the fact that the group comprises individual members who may process events in their own particular ways, even taking group events home with them to digest independently. Though Neri does not directly address the problem of leadership in non-therapeutic groups, he provides valuable interpretation through his adaptation of Bion's "alpha function" and the concept of a group "field." Particularly important for Neri is that the group provides a space in which particular problems may be deposited, and individuals may then pick up these remainders, process them unconsciously - even dream about them - and provide digested material back to the group at an appropriate time.

For Neri, the individual lives led outside of the group setting inform and enrich the therapeutic aspects of the group, and preserve individuals' sense of identity and individuality while fulfilling a work-group role. Neri's use of the field is intriguing, because it reminds us that we build interpersonal patterns of behavior which may vary depending on the setting and the composition of individuals present. The field emerges as something like a third party (in dyadic relationships) that seems to exist independently from the individual members and forms a container into which split-off parts of the personality can be deposited and enclosed in "cysts." Far from being a regressive state, Neri's field is, in a sense, an evolution of projective identification.

Bion's concept of a work group - as opposed to the basic assumption groups - provides us with another lens through which to view individual advancement versus

group development. A work group, for Bion, operates in a “scientific” way. Being scientific does not mean that the group adheres to Popperian notions of falsifiability or scientific method. A scientific outlook more closely corresponds with the group’s ability to take on ego functions, such as reality-testing. Rather than expressing paranoid-schizoid anxieties, the work group is able to confront and address these anxieties while working toward common goals in a more or less rational manner. In contrast, Bion’s basic assumption groups provide us with a non-scientific kind of group interaction, which harkens back to Le Bon’s less favorable characterizations of the group as being intellectually inferior to individuals. The basic assumption group is utterly incapable of forward motion. Bion recounts an episode in which members of a group began to give advice to one another; each member recommended a course of action he himself had acknowledged only moments earlier was futile²²². Bion thought at the time that the group’s motto should be “vendors of quack nostrums unite”. It occurred to him that the group had cohered; they had formed a united front against him as a therapist. He concludes: “The idea that neurotics cannot cooperate has to be modified.”

The non-scientific group, then, is more concerned with reducing tension - much as Freud described the conservative nature of the instincts, which seek to discharge tension rather than allow it to build - and may show teamwork, but only insofar as the teamwork resists change or development. Even so, Bion’s example of the pharaoh’s monuments seems to indicate that meaningful work can be done even

²²² Bion, *Experiences in Groups*, pg. 51

under a dependence basic assumption, although his historical example was not fully qualified in a clinical sense and ought to be taken in the spirit it was written. Perhaps it is fairer to say that a basic assumption group may develop some level of work group status, even as it is essentially directed out of anxiety. In that formation, of course, the kinds of expressions of anxiety that the leader presents would, of necessity, become a part of the culture and lead to a kind of artistic progress of the group.

But a stricter look at scientific groups affords us another comparison: between what Thomas Kuhn calls “ordinary science” and “paradigm shifts.” In ordinary group processes, individuals work together under common ideas and ways of viewing the objects of their study, and make small advances which lead to somewhat larger ones over time. To a certain extent, the individual advances are interchangeable. The dominant scientific culture largely informs the kinds of experiments and developments that take place. But the paradigmatic shift is a radical change in viewing the objects, often the result of a single individual’s unique insight and capacity. Of course, Freud is correct that historical events are often over-determined; a science may become ripe for expression in new form or under a new set of radically different ideas, while a small number of individuals are able to see beyond its current limitations to solve the outstanding problems, as in a crisis condition for Kuhn.

Group Psychology and the Intelligence Debate

The exoteric argument one encounters in Plato’s *Republic* is that philosophers do not rule, and that those who have the potential to be philosophers are coopted to

serve individual interests. But the views of Herrnstein and Murray imply that intelligence itself leads to moral uprightness and success, and further that high intelligence confers high influence; the argument becomes, in effect, historiographic. The intelligence debate therefore seems to be a recapitulation of the arguments for and against the great-man theory.

If Herrnstein and Murray are correct, the task of making rule philosophic becomes more and more urgent. Insofar as a cognitive elite has implicitly achieved unacknowledged influence on the political, a representative democracy must transform this arrangement into something explicit; to do otherwise would be to allow it to remain repressed. To be sure, Galton, Herrnstein, and Murray appear to overstate their case for the individual. A person who is smart enough seems to generate *sui generis* solutions to every situation. Their imagined high-IQ busboys, for example, anticipate an optimal path through the restaurant based upon average dining times and observed cues. Every human endeavor, for Herrnstein and Murray, can seemingly be improved upon through sheer intellectual power. Gould treats IQ as a mere mathematical artifact as well as a tool of social control. For Gould, there is no such thing as “mental worth,” and attempting to impose such a concept through a single number, as IQ does, is an error of hierarchy. Gould seems more sympathetic to something like Howard Gardner’s multiple intelligences theory, which attempts to remove the priority from spatial, logical, and mathematical intelligences and create a more expansive definition of intelligence. Gladwell argues that IQ is a very narrow kind of problem solving ability. For Gladwell, the individual does not seem to have any intrinsic fitness for purpose that is not given, framed by, and created through the

culture in which he lives. In combination, one has a sense of American ambivalence to innate talent and intelligence. On the one hand, Americans want to celebrate those who thrive based on hard work and talent, in an echo of early protestant values; on the other, Americans are uneasy with the idea that individuals have equal rights but unequal endowments.

Underlying these contrasting views is a tacit faith in collectivism on the parts of Gould and Gladwell, and individualism on the parts of Herrnstein, Murray, and Galton. These extreme views require moderation to be coherent; Freud and Neri provide this kind of moderating influence in their treatments of group behavior. To be clear, collectivism and individualism should be understood as descriptive rather than prescriptive labels; Le Bon, for example, believes that the human world is best *described* when we examine nations or groups and look to their underlying commonalities. He believes that “heroes” are, in essence, legends fabricated from an underlying social framework. Individuals, however, are more capable of real thought and independent expression. Galton, however, urges that men of genius are virtually impervious to obstacles; whatever defects in education or lack of opportunity they may have encountered in their lives, a true genius will educate himself and rise to the top of his chosen profession. Herrnstein and Murray are somewhat more circumspect, holding that individuals are under a constant threat of loss of vital resources necessary to fully realize their genetic potential. The thrust of their argument is hardly different, but they emphasize the threat that collectivism poses to individual development.

The collectivist account, as framed by Gladwell, has a large emotional component informed by the severe threat to the ego that exceptional individuals represent. In Bion and Neri, individuals feel their egos become threatened by the group situation; the response is a group illusion, which has as its nexus the phantasy that this particular group is the best group. Group narcissism is substituted for individual narcissism as members experience depersonalization and disorientation. This defense mechanism allows us to displace our own anxieties about being individually insufficient; at the same time, it must be profoundly opposed to the concept of individuals who have no need for group membership²²³. Faced with the unsettling possibility that there are those among us who excel intellectually by dint of genetic lottery, the wounded ego desperately attempts to rationalize their successes away.

One such attempt, as Herrnstein and Murray have framed it, is the “compensating skills fallacy,” in which one posits that while intelligence has its benefits, other skills, such as empathy in a social worker, can compensate for the disadvantages of a relatively lower IQ²²⁴. Herrnstein and Murray point out that this

²²³ Cf. *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1177b1; those with the most wisdom are also the most thoroughly self-sufficient, even if a life of contemplation is augmented by other people. While this means that philosophy exists outside, or alongside the city, it also means that philosophy rejects the city as the institution best suited to producing human happiness.

²²⁴ Cf. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Ch. 13: “NATURE hath made men so equal in the faculties of body and mind as that, though there be found one man sometimes manifestly stronger in body or of quicker mind than another, yet when all is reckoned together the difference between man and man is not so considerable as that one man can thereupon claim to himself any benefit to which another may not pretend as well as he.” When all is “reckoned together,” one cannot make a hierarchy of men

reasoning is fallacious because it relies on the assumption that higher intelligence must imply that other skills (the ones used to compensate) are lower in intelligent subjects than in their less intelligent counterparts. It is clear, however, that we speak about the benefits of intelligence *ceteris paribus*; absent scientific evidence that lower intelligence is compensated by some other faculty, it is an irrational assumption.

Gladwell attempts to demonstrate the inadequacy of intelligence via a single, powerful counterexample. Gladwell wants us to understand that if the so-called “smartest man in America” is unable to succeed in any meaningful sense, then any faith in IQ or intelligence is misplaced. Yet Gladwell’s primary point - that neither IQ nor talent is dispositive of success - is undermined by his very treatment of Christopher Langan. If we accept the anecdotal account that Langan, for instance, was able to match Jimi Hendrix “lick for lick” at fifteen, Langan surely disproves the hypothesis that virtuoso (or even elite) performance requires ten thousand hours of practice - a claim Gladwell urges earlier in the work. The ten thousand hours thesis is not hedged by a requirement for “practical intelligence,” as Gladwell does when he compares Langan and Robert Oppenheimer.

Galton has a profound distrust of the bulk of the population; he argues, for instance, that society itself has become more complex than those in the lesser intellectual classes can manage. While Galton concedes that some forms of success are due to the spirit of the time (such as some literary successes), he argues that those

because one excess balances another deficiency. For Hobbes, however, once one has set aside “that skill of proceeding upon general and infallible rules, called science,” the differences between individual faculties of the mind are slight.

successes are thereby disqualified from being true works of genius absent other characteristics which would render them enduring. He gives a nod to the collective nature of science, but within the context of a group of already intelligent human beings communicating and furthering one another's discoveries. His hope to advance humanity based on the efforts of the intelligent seems to imply that society is as a helpless child in need of guidance by the most able members.

Freud's argument that the group itself may possess creative genius allows the political group to be cast in a new role. Bion's scientific work group provides the prototype for functional democracy in which the electorate provides its own solutions rather than relying on leaders to impose policy. That is, when the group is not indulging its phantasies as neurosis, it is capable of intelligent deliberation and creative thought. Still, implicit in Freud's formulation is an acknowledgement that exceptional individuals exist. Such men at the very least reshape the myths, legends, and products of their cultures. In contrast with Le Bon, Freud's leaders are far more capable of autonomy; as relics of the primal father who oppressed the original band of brothers, these leaders are like Friedrich Nietzsche's overman. As such, they are generative and self-sufficient, and need not depend exclusively upon a connection to hereditary ideas as in Le Bon's account.

While Neri does not explicitly address exceptional individuals - the closest account is when he describes the group therapist as an oracle - he stresses the integration of individual psychic life within the context of group expression and fields. Both Freud and Neri acknowledge the interdependence of the group and the individual. Particularly, Neri's use of the "alpha function" provides a space for the

group to provide valuable insight into particular problems while still utilizing individual intelligences. Regardless of the context (individual or group), Freud's concept of a rich psychological life dominated by opposing drives and instincts emphasizes that neither group nor individual life is "dominant" in a psychological or historical sense. All psychological processes, for Freud, evolve from initial interpersonal relationships via the Oedipal conflict. As such, the individual can never be entirely removed from the group. However, how a person processes these psychic events is highly individual, and contradicts the notion that a large share of our mental lives are dominated by a primitive mentality or inherited racial ideas, as in Le Bon.

Summary

Due to the gulf between the ego's ability to test reality and the rigidity imposed by the scientific worldview, objective facts about ourselves often meet stiff resistance. Freud encountered this as the ego avoided the repressed, but it is no less true when we confront painful truths such as the idea that some individuals may be objectively more intelligent than ourselves. It may be that the ego can only fully accept this idea when confronted by a crisis. Perhaps, however, a tempering and lowering of expectations, as well as an acknowledgement of the interdependence of the group and its leader is a means to resolve the tension. The cognitive elite would also have to recognize the character of its people, and would need to resist the temptation to dismiss certain fears and tensions as irrational and therefore irrelevant. The effective leader has to recognize the saliency of irrational impulses, and also that many of the goals of modern society do not have a full rational account. The direction

of a nation is driven by both intellect and desire. As Plato pointed out, a philosophical class would only lead because it loves and appreciates the city that has provided it with the opportunity to become philosophical. The city should love the philosophers for making it prosperous and healthy. When the philosopher appreciates the tenuousness of his position – indeed, the tenuousness of philosophical thought itself – he may be capable of maintaining a harmonious ordering of the city that respects both the heights and the limits of human intellect. Our irrational nature cannot help but influence our attempts to arrive at scientific knowledge, and it informs what we expect of political leadership. Depth psychology provides an interesting lens through which we can examine our biases for and against intelligence testing, as well as understanding the interrelationship between intelligence and the unconscious mind. This understanding is enhanced by looking to group psychology as a way of discussing the affective bonds between the leader and his people, and how these bonds run deeper than rational agreement that the best should rule. This chapter has shown that psychoanalytic concepts provide a middle ground between the denial of intelligent, philosophical leadership as a political goal and the overestimation of intelligence as a solution to political problems.

Chapter 5: Intelligence and American Democracy

In this chapter I will first consider the relationship of the intellectual and intelligence to the United States of America, using Richard Hofstadter's *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* as a starting point. From there, I will consider to what extent philosophical rule is possible, and whether experts fulfill a similar role in our democracy. I will then consider the relationship between liberal education and democracy and provide a brief critique of current trends in educational focus. I will then address the issue of heritability of IQ and its relation to race, and the relationship with justice in an egalitarian system. Finally, I will conclude with a provisional solution that attempts to resolve these issues, taking into account the theoretical framework provided in the previous chapters.

The idea of philosophical statesmanship, or of any kind of elite that has special privileges in the American republic, would in the best case be understood as anachronistic. American-style democracy largely subscribes to the founding principle that all men are created equal, and our claims to meritocracy largely rest upon this premise. The widespread distrust of IQ as a meaningful measure speaks, in part, to this bias.

The founding of America represented an exceedingly rare phenomenon: the coincidence of intellectuals and political power²²⁵. A well-educated aristocracy made

²²⁵ Cf. Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, pg. 145

their conspiracy public and involved the people in an intellectual debate²²⁶ over the constitution of a new union. These men could not be called philosophers in the most serious sense of the term, but they were certainly intellectuals, or scholars in Leo Strauss' terminology. It was in the nature of such scholarship to compare the teachings of the great minds that came before them and found a republic on a provisional settlement of those great disputes. The fact that this settlement, culminating in the ratification of a short and ostensibly accessible document, is little understood by the electorate has produced a rift in American understandings of democracy and equality. Any introductory civics class makes the distinction between direct democracy and representative democracy, and the distinction is usually explained as an administrative convenience: direct democracy requires too much leisure time of citizens. Sometimes it is expressed in terms of class struggle, as safeguards developed by the moneyed classes to prevent the poor from taking full control.

America's religious heritage and relative youth has allowed it to accept the idea of American exceptionalism; Alexis de Tocqueville wrote about the hand of Providence in American-style democracy without irony, and a religion that put forth good works as evidence of a good soul surely cemented the idea in the American consciousness. So the American mind can easily maintain that our country is both predestined to greatness and that our greatness is the result of our merit; that all men

²²⁶ *The Federalist Papers*

are created equal, but some have more merit than others, as though merit were wholly a matter of character as something distinct from nature or nurture.

Richard Hofstadter's description of this coincidence of intellect and power as a *rapprochement* signals his view of a separate America – or a separate world – inhabited by intellectuals, that must resume diplomatic relations with the rest of the country. Hofstadter's intellectuals are abstract thinkers much of the time, but must descend from the light into the cave to provide practical advice to statesmen. Intellectuals could not maintain their power in America because they could no longer be omni-competent in an increasingly complex and specialized world. We should be especially skeptical of Hofstadter's point. One is reminded of Hippias, who seemed to believe that acquiring many arts was the precondition for virtue. Casting the intellectual's role in political life as one of expertise represents an irreconcilable alienation of the life of the intellect and statecraft, because the expert is unconcerned with the good of the state generally. Hofstadter does not attempt to differentiate between philosophers and intellectuals, but it seems as though the intellectual embraces some philosophical habits of mind, namely the mixture of playfulness and seriousness toward ideas. The intellectual, however, does not aim to understand the whole or the good in a comprehensive sense, but is concerned with an area of expertise.

Hofstadter distinguishes between intelligence and intellect²²⁷, arguing that intelligence is generally perceived as a positive quality, while intellect is perceived

²²⁷ Ibid., pg. 24

negatively. Intellect may even be perceived as orthogonal to intelligence, so that a person may be considered an intellectual without intelligence. Hofstadter's depiction focuses on the kinds of mental work the intellectual performs (abstract, theoretical) versus the intelligent person (concrete, practical), and in this sense echoes the same distrust ancient Greeks had of sophists and philosophers. Intelligence is less of a choice than being an intellectual is, as choosing the intellectual life is choosing particular habits of mind. Intelligence, insofar as it is an inherent quality, cannot be so easily dismissed as a character flaw; intelligence can also be directly useful to others. To choose to be an intellectual is to choose to turn away from political life, because one withdraws into a world of abstractions and theory, contemplating what is above instead of what is present. The criticism of intellectuals reflects that they are feared to be amoral; science can be safely construed as value-free, in most cases, because it ultimately represents concrete claims about the physical world. Intellectuals, however, are perceived to apply their intellects to particular movements or ideologies, and their peculiar style of argumentation forecloses entry to the uninitiated.

Philosophical Rule in America

Strictly speaking, it is impossible for a philosopher to rule because, *qua* philosopher, he cannot put down into law as final what must always be considered provisional. The work of the philosopher is always explorative and never aimed at practice, because the nature of truth is not to be applied. The philosopher, then, is the person who has the mental excellence that makes him the best suited to rule, but the

moment that he rules he ceases to engage in philosophy. Philosophical rule, in the strict sense, is therefore self-contradictory, which is one reason why statecraft must be an obligation forced upon Plato's philosophical class. Governance does not come about as the happy overflow of philosophical work, but as a distinct activity from which philosophy remains wholly outside.

This raises the question of whether Plato was a philosopher when he advised Dion, or Jean-Jacques Rousseau when he wrote the *Constitution of Poland*. "Philosopher" would be a special kind of epithet that only applies when one is actually engaged in philosophy, unlike a runner who is a runner even when seated, or a carpenter who remains a carpenter even when reading a novel. One may identify people by their vocations insofar as they have the capacity to exercise the virtues of their profession, so that we may call a man a runner who chooses to be sedentary, if he is capable of running excellently. A doctor is a person who possesses the medical art, even if he makes no use of it. But the philosopher is not called a king even if he has the art of ruling²²⁸, and he does not seem to be a philosopher by passively possessing an art of seeking wisdom.

Philosophers can rule, then, only in the abstract sense. They create philosophical works or teachings which are transmitted to us and inform or influence political life and culture. In this way, Machiavelli establishes new modes and orders while writing about them, even though he does not exercise direct control over government or have the ear of a prince. Plato influences our understanding of political

²²⁸ Though he may be a "king in truth," see Alfarabi, *Selected Aphorisms*, 32

life even while writing about an impossible regime. Plato's allegory of the cave is therefore misleading; the philosophers seem to maintain themselves in the light, and rely upon the rest of us to reach out and carry their works back into the cave.

The restrictive semantic problems aside, a strict definition of the philosopher should include only the greatest minds, not merely members of the philosophy department faculty²²⁹. For Strauss, education is a process of transmitting understandings from a teacher to a student. Because there cannot be an infinite regress, there are some teachers who are not students²³⁰. Strauss' argument calls to mind Machiavelli's three classes of brains – the first class understands by itself. This point requires some consideration, because clearly Plato was the student of Socrates, Aristotle was the student of Plato, and Machiavelli was heir to an entire philosophical tradition including Aristotle and Polybius. If these men were philosophers under Strauss' strict definition, then it does not preclude learning *anything* from a teacher. What it does preclude is the work of mere scholarship, which rearranges and compares what others have understood independently. The philosopher understands something profound beyond what he has been taught, particularly something so profound that we cannot even be assured of the philosopher's presence in any given lifetime. If we want to speak sensibly about philosophical rule we are compelled to speak of the philosopher in a broader sense.

The looser definition of philosopher would include intellectuals broadly, or people who are engaged in intellectual work and are therefore presupposed to be

²²⁹ Cf Leo Strauss, *An Introduction to Political Philosophy*, pg. 317

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, pg. 311; also see Machiavelli, *Prince*, Ch. 22.

capable of more educated deliberation. Plato asked us to consider that the statesman is actually an image of the philosopher. Let us assume that Plato's intention was to write the *Sophist* and the *Statesman* but to only imply the *Philosopher*. The final dialogue might be intended for the student to complete on his own, exercising that which he has learned from the prior dialogues. But it might also be the case that the philosopher does not exist in the same way that sophists and statesmen exist; the philosopher is ephemeral, and we are always forced to intimate his existence by showing what is *not* a philosopher. Sophists and statesmen are images of the philosopher, aspects of the whole.

Just so, intellectuals represent a facet of the philosopher without grasping the whole. The closest thing we may have to the strictest definition of the philosopher is someone who has considered what the philosophers have had to say, and has been educated in that great conversation in the most thorough way possible. Even if such people ultimately lack the equipment to adjudicate disputes between the greatest minds²³¹, ideological humility is often a virtue in a statesman. Even if philosophers were more common, would we be able to recognize them? If we are not competent to judge in their disputes, are we competent to determine who is a philosopher as opposed to an intellectual, scholar, or sophist? We seem to be consigned to recognizing philosophers only in retrospect, and on the authority of other philosophers or scholars.

²³¹ Ibid., pg. 318

The extent to which Plato considered it desirable or appropriate for philosophers to rule is an open question. If we looked to his life for practical examples, we would be sorely disappointed. The Academy was forced outside of the city walls, after all; the philosophical life was ultimately consigned to a separate existence beyond the city and its laws. This mode of education contrasts distinctly with the inherently political nature of the Platonic dialogues. Socrates took on all comers, as it were, and was willing to engage interlocutors publicly about matters of public import.

Creating something like Plato's Academy today would be an unrealistic and impracticable exercise. The precondition of the Academy was Plato's own genius, and the likelihood of finding even one person living who could fulfill this role is vanishingly small. Plato teaches us volumes about education, but above all, the objective of education is to teach the student in the best way possible. We are limited in providing a living embodiment of this ideal by the fact that we are all imperfect teachers and students. As Leo Strauss put it, "in the case of the highest form of education those conditions are very rarely fulfilled, and one cannot do anything to produce them; the only things we can do regarding them are not to interfere with their interplay and to prevent such interference."²³² This observation contains an implicit criticism of the concept of gifted education. If we lack the ability to determine the best teachers, but we possess the ability to find the best students, we reduce the likelihood that any of these students will encounter the best teachers by forcing them

²³² Leo Strauss, *An Introduction to Political Philosophy*, pp. 321-322

to interact with a limited subset of educators chosen by arbitrary or less than ideal standards. The second-best solution, it would seem, is to rely on the great books not merely as the curriculum, but as the teachers themselves.

Plato's Socrates, when discussing a postulated natural virtue with Meno, makes a point that if virtue were naturally occurring, we should identify the virtuous and set them up in the Acropolis to be free from corrupting influences. Plato's Socrates was able to speak ironically while also saying something truthful; to the extent that some human beings are better learners than others, disruptions to their education represent a greater loss. It is important to set aside a space for the best students to learn not only from the best teachers we can provide, but to challenge each other. One of the most valuable aspects of the Socratic method is that it forces the student to interact with others who may actively challenge his beliefs and arguments. This kind of education is time consuming and difficult, and it is directly at odds with a results-driven system of practical education that emphasizes competence in narrowly conceived practical skills.

The American preference for practical education has no more explicit contemporary expression than the call for more science, technology, engineering, and math graduates. Practical education in previous generations was certainly less cerebral, focusing on agriculture, hygiene, and vocational skills²³³. The emphasis on science-based education is no less practical, but finds its roots in a changing world economy that values mechanical skills less than so-called knowledge work.

²³³ Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, pg. 336

Underlying this push is the assumption that we are engaged in progress in the general sense, as though scientific progress were also moral progress. The knowledge worker, however, is not a philosopher, nor even an intellectual. Such a worker may be intelligent, but he is unconcerned with the good; he is the epitome of instrumental rationality. Because science purports to be value-free, the knowledge worker can only supply the solution to technical problems, not moral ones.

We should also understand from Plato that memory is not our highest intellectual function. Because modern education so often rewards the memory and punishes novelty, our best students are often trained to argue from authority. Memory and tradition are inextricably linked; memory is necessary for the human being to function, and tradition is necessary for the city. We should not, however, confuse the necessary functions for the highest. In the *Laws*, the Athenian Stranger contemplated that there would be students who refuse to accept received wisdom, and who thereby challenge the authority of the laws and the state. The stranger's solution for this is to give these students something additional to contemplate, and see if they leave satisfied. But if the students remain unsatisfied, if they cannot accept the reeducation provided by the nocturnal council, then they should be made to see the necessity of respecting the laws even while pursuing wisdom that may contradict the basis of those laws. The implication is that many students are spirited who are not intelligent, and they challenge authority more for sport than due to love of wisdom. Conversely, intelligence alone is not enough; the student must have the necessary determination not to settle for easy answers or take the traditional as given.

Recently, Angela Lee Duckworth et al have shown that IQ tests do not necessarily show maximal intellectual ability²³⁴, but are dependent on motivation. High IQ scores are the product of both high intelligence and motivation to apply that intelligence, according to Duckworth. Duckworth's conclusions comport well with what Plato implies: timid intelligence is suited to certain kinds of work, but not statesmanship. This result is problematic for intelligence researchers who want to show that intelligence is hereditary, stable, and predictive of long-term life outcomes. The usefulness of IQ as a measure, however, does not depend on its being hereditary. Rather, what matters is whether "intelligence" is a meaningful term, IQ measures what we call intelligence, and intelligence is useful and important in political leadership. James Flynn calls this a semantic argument, and points out that substituting "who learns fastest and best" for "intelligence" meets what we commonly mean by the term. Further, IQ measures for this definition well.

This argument also applies regarding criticisms that IQ tests are not culture-fair. The observation that different cultures place different emphasis on testing and compliance with procedures similar to testing scenarios means that we cannot accurately compare results between cultures²³⁵. However, if the tests measure intelligence as it is expressed in our culture, then they are still useful measures within our society.

²³⁴ Duckworth et al, *Role of test motivation in intelligence testing*

²³⁵ Kamin, *Science and Politics of I.Q.*, pg. 176; Richardson, *Howard Andrew Knox*, pg. 89

Plato and Machiavelli make independent cases for the importance of intelligence in political leadership. We can look to them, therefore, for guidance as to how we might order our political and educational institutions to accomplish the goal of rule that is both intelligent and makes use of philosophy. A reconsideration of our educational system after looking to Plato would yield several important results. The first is that we would need to identify the best, most intelligent students. IQ tests are one of the most efficient means of making this determination, as they indicate not only intelligence but zeal, as Duckworth shows. The second is that we have to reconsider the content of the education in light of what is most important to educating a ruling class. As to political ordering, we must consider what it would look like to have an intelligent political class guided by such an education.

Expertise

It is important to first distinguish a false form of intelligent rule. Hofstadter writes about intellectualism in the comprehensive sense of a person devoted to the life of the mind²³⁶, and one who has a certain predisposition to ideas characterized by the dual sense of piety and playfulness²³⁷. When dealing with the coincidence of intellectualism and power, however, he seems to be forced to conclude that the intellectual's closest association with power is in the guise of the expert²³⁸. This role is second-best for Hofstadter, as the highest example is that of the founding fathers,

²³⁶ Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, pg. 27

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, pg. 29

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, pg. 217

who were both statesmen and intellectuals at once²³⁹. Within a patrician elite, “men of intellect moved freely and spoke with enviable authority,” and “the intellectual as expert was a negligible force; but the intellectual as ruling-class gentleman was a leader in every segment of society.” Hofstadter’s suggestion is that the influence of experts was negligible because the need for expertise was less keen.

Hofstadter’s view seems fatalistic, insofar as scientific and technological progress have placed us in a situation in which expertise is required and omniscience is impossible. It is this very need for expertise that makes the public resent experts²⁴⁰ as the constant reminder of our inability to completely manage our own lives. As Dorothy Dinnerstein points out, social instability and technological change militate against our own understanding of ourselves as competent, powerful adults²⁴¹. The expert, then, represents the usurpation of adulthood and agency. The expert, in the abstract, is not a particular expert, but a member of an elite cadre that instructs us relentlessly in how to perform every aspect of our lives.

More recently, Americans rebel against the expert as largely unreliable, except in narrow areas. The expert can be trusted for technical advice if his recommendations can be tried and tested. In less straightforward domains, however, the cliché is that one can always produce one study to counter another. If Hofstadter is correct that Americans are obsessed with the practical, then intellectualism can only engage politically through practical expertise; but even this *rapprochement* is

²³⁹ Ibid., pp. 145-146

²⁴⁰ Ibid., pg. 34

²⁴¹ Dorothy Dinnerstein, *Mermaid and the Minotaur*, pg. 289

tenuous because the nature of intellectualism and science is that ideas are never final. For any matter of sufficient complexity, expert advice cannot be relied upon as simply true. This sense of expertise is therefore very different from the kind of knowledge a physician or cobbler could be said to have for Plato or Aristotle; rather than representing a lower kind of perfection, experts are expected to be educated guessers. Such uncertainty is particularly unattractive in a statesman.

Hofstadter is less concerned with political power, however, than he is about public respect for intellectualism and intellect²⁴². The fact that intellectuals exert cultural and technological pressures in American society should garner recognition for the role they play in public life. Intellectuals exist to some extent independent of the practical world, but it is unjust to deride them when their works have an often unseen importance in how we live. The ubiquity of experts and their utilization as advisers to the powerful seems to be a fulcrum for Hofstadter to leverage intellectuals as a positive social and political force worthy of respect and support. Technocracy, however, is not rule by the wise. Hofstadter's argument seems to imply that scientific complexity obviates the possibility of wise rule, or at least alienates this rule from intellectualism as such. That is, the intellectual is necessarily specialized due to scientific progress; because the intellectual cannot understand the whole, he cannot claim the comprehensive knowledge necessary to wise rule.

In a sense, this solution to the impossibility of philosophical rule is reminiscent of Machiavelli's formula: the dyad of the prince and adviser.

²⁴² Hofstadter, pg. 20

Machiavelli, however, stressed the importance of finding a single adviser on whom the prince could rely exclusively, ostensibly as a hedge against a confusing battle of advisers. The Machiavellian adviser, however, has a more comprehensive understanding than the expert has, and so the think-tank or brain trust becomes subject to a classical criticism.

In Plato's *Apology*, Socrates gives an account of his actions following the pronouncement from the Delphic oracle that no one was wiser than he. Socrates claims that he approached those who seemed to be, or were esteemed to be wise, in an effort to falsify the oracle's claim. Socrates' "cycle of labors" begins with the politicians and ends with the skilled craftsmen. The artisans Socrates criticizes are similar to the experts we have today: they possess technical knowledge in a narrow field²⁴³. Socrates' criticism is that while they have a science, these experts generalize their proficiency and claim to have a mastery of the most important kinds of knowledge; they claim to be wise (*Apology*, 21c-22e).

Aristotle begins the *Nicomachean Ethics* with an implicit answer to the Socratic criticism of experts. Every art is performed for some end, and this end appears to be higher than the work itself. For all arts, there appear to be more

²⁴³ Rousseau's *First Discourse* similarly criticizes the arts and sciences by reference to Plato's *Apology*, see pg. 10. Rousseau changes "artisans" to "artists," and omits the politicians. Roger D. Masters and Christopher J. Kelly argue that Rousseau's changes "make a point that is very different from the one made by Socrates" (pg. 201, note 10), but the thrust of Socrates' criticism is intact. Socrates did not think artisanry an unworthy occupation, but that the artisans should restrain their ultracrepidarianism. Rousseau's change might instead reflect a belief that artisans of his day did not have the pretense of wisdom, or that such a defect was more easily cured in people who were not devoted to luxury. In Rousseau's view, thinking oneself wise would be a species of the more general corruption of *amour-propre* (self-love).

comprehensive arts that make use of their results, and this forms a hierarchy. At the top of this hierarchy must be the political art, which makes use of all of the other arts in its work²⁴⁴. The artisans are tasked with creating goods in the material sense, but the political art is that which is responsible for taking minor goods and transforming them into a more comprehensive good for human beings. That is, the political art is what allows morally neutral proficiencies to become instruments of value and contributors to the good and to human happiness. Experts are necessary but insufficient to wise rule. It is not necessary to reify hierarchies to appreciate Aristotle's argument. We form political organizations, in the broad sense, to make our lives easier, and the specialization of tasks eases that burden further. The availability of expertise affords both comfort and leisure. The modern intellectual claims more in common with Socrates than the cobbler, because his is primarily intellectual work, and because the academy seems to stand outside of the political in the way the philosopher can stand outside of the city. In his capacity as expert, however, the engineer or scientist is called upon to produce concrete results; that is, to manufacture a product.

The difficulty is that we do not seem to have a science of statesmanship in the same way we have a science of city-planning or economics, much less physics. The void Hofstadter fills with intellectuals, however, is not adequately met by technical skill, or even by an intellectual's stance toward ideas. Socrates does not want us to dispose of experts; after all, they do possess a kind of knowledge that is useful to the

²⁴⁴ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1094a1-1094b20

city. Their expertise, however, must be understood as narrow and subject to the deliberation of someone who has a higher art. That higher art must comprise the understanding that experts overestimate the scope of their competence, as well as the capacity to take the useful product of expertise and leave those parts that overstep those bounds. That higher art must also understand that an expert education is necessarily an incomplete education; that there must be a more comprehensive understanding of the human things than is to be gained by a narrow specialty, even if this more comprehensive understanding falls short of wisdom.

The necessity of experts places the ruler in a difficult position. If he were highly competent in the art to which the expert claims expertise, he would not require the assistance of the expert. At the same time, he is charged with ascertaining the value of this expertise and applying it politically. The compromise we embrace today is “scientific consensus,” which seems to mean accepting claims on authority, but only when there are enough authorities in agreement. This arrangement has a certain charm for a democracy, because it seems to represent science democratically, on the one hand. On the other, it preserves the fact-value distinction so that individuals can cite ostensibly value-free science in support of their political opinions. The situation recalls Machiavelli’s argument that the people are wise because they are able to distinguish between the better of two speakers, that is, political experts²⁴⁵. If we take Machiavelli seriously in his contention, the crucial difference is that in his formulation the two speakers are understood to be speaking persuasively by the

²⁴⁵ Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I 58.3

people, not scientifically. When Machiavelli advises one how to advise, however, he is careful to point out that one should never appear too resolute or confident in one's advice; one should not, in short, appear partisan. This insistence on the appearance of impartiality is an important component to hidden rule in Machiavelli, and a feature that we seem to have unconsciously adopted when we apply science to political problems.

Of course, experts do not appeal directly to the people in our regime. Experts inform Senate sub-committees, or advise the President, or provide press-releases to journalists, but the judgment of experts is not a matter of democratic participation. Mansfield emphasizes Machiavelli's use of the verb *maneggiare* to indicate that the people are managed by the true rulers – they are ruled without seeming to be ruled²⁴⁶. Hidden rule is necessary, in Machiavelli's view, because the people are a body without a head; there is no form of public deliberation that does not ultimately depend on the suggestions of individuals. If individuals were all equally capable and motivated to advise one another, then it might be possible for the people to rule themselves. Machiavelli divides human beings into two classes, however: those who need to dominate, and those who wish to be secure. The need to dominate is not confined to the aristocracy and shows itself most conspicuously in the rise of new men who claim to represent the interests of the people. The men who are able to be the heads of overt acts must disguise their intent as the will of the people, because to make their ambition known would incur the enmity of the people. Rule must be

²⁴⁶ Harvey Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue*, pp. 236-237

hidden in another way, however. The men who are able to act are not necessarily the same men who are the best suited to decide *how* to act. The vigor of youth must be paired with the intellect of the adviser.

Machiavelli would not advocate for the substitution of experts for advisers, because the kinds of knowledge the expert provides are not the same kinds that Machiavelli offers. For us, the adviser is already deeply problematic for a representative democracy because he is not subject to election. Further, Machiavelli suggests wealth and honors to keep the adviser loyal, so that the prince seems to be wholly dependent upon the adviser's judgment, but the adviser is only tethered to the prince in material terms. The adviser therefore seems to be capable of instituting his own rule beyond any individual state, in the Machiavellian sense of a state as a particular domination of one over another. The adviser exists outside of the democratic process, cannot be held to account by the people, and has nebulous influence. The substitution of experts into this role is even more dubious. Experts are not only politically translucent; they are numerous, so that even if one were to identify a given expert to the people, his or her removal could hardly be expected to meaningfully alter the course of government.

Hofstadter suggests that Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration represented a shift in American thinking about intellectuals. Rather than using an educated civil service as a conservative force, experts were embraced as a way to tame an out of control economy, particularly as a moral backstop to capitalist excesses²⁴⁷. The close

²⁴⁷ Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, pp. 197-198

relationship of the professoriat to power was, in Hofstadter's opinion, illusory²⁴⁸. He contends that at the height of their power, experts did not enact any meaningful change that was not advocated by a suitably powerful constituency²⁴⁹; in short, there is no problem of hidden rule for Hofstadter. This objection ignores the relationship of the Machiavellian adviser to the young prince: the prince's passions provide the impetus to act, the adviser's intellect forms the plan to succeed. The adviser's own intentions are necessarily hidden. Further, the fact that the electorate is confused or unable to tell the extent to which experts rule is problematic in itself. Where influence is unclear, where the level of authority is unknown, it is impossible to have truly open rule.

Liberal Education and Intelligent Democracy

Leo Strauss called liberal education the "ladder to universal aristocracy" in *What is Liberal Education*, a phrase he was asked to elaborate on in *Liberal Education and Responsibility*. Conspicuously, Strauss' explanation of this ladder seems to belie the possibility of universal aristocracy; it simply does not seem possible that the people, in general, would become liberally educated to the extent necessary. He cites Rousseau to that effect as pointing out that such a form of government would be fit for gods, not men²⁵⁰. For Strauss, the universal aristocracy

²⁴⁸ Ibid., pg. 202

²⁴⁹ Ibid., pg. 216-217

²⁵⁰ Strauss, pg. 313. Also see Rousseau's *On the Social Contract*, Book III, Chapter IV. Similar sentiments extend back further: Averroes wrote, commenting on the

seems to be something like the philosophical pursuit of the good. Achieving knowledge of the whole, or of the good in the most comprehensive sense, is almost certainly impossible to human beings. The abandonment of the pursuit of the good, however, results in the adoption of moral nihilism (or historicism or moral relativism, which resolve to the same thing). The pursuit of the good, then, is necessary because it produces salutary effects in itself. In the same way, the recognition of the possibility of a universal aristocracy presents us with a meaningful challenge to maintain the kind of education that seeks it out.

If universal aristocracy is impossible – that is, if it is impossible for the people to be so well educated that they can evaluate scientific claims within their rightful scope and apply those claims to moral political ends – what possible remedies might we have without abandoning democracy? Thomas Jefferson’s letter to John Adams provides some instruction as to how such a result might be achieved.

Jefferson and Adams debated the question of aristocracy; Adams asked “But who are these “*aristoi*”? Who shall judge?²⁵¹” To this question, Jefferson distinguished between an artificial aristocracy and a natural aristocracy. The artificial aristocracy was first founded upon force, according to Jefferson, and later upon wealth and birth. The natural aristocracy, in contrast, is grounded in virtue and

Republic, that “For if there were in every individual the possibility of attaining all these virtues – each and every one of them necessarily attaining them – each would be serving and served, lord and lorded over. Nature would have done something in vain since they all would have the disposition to be lords. This is impossible since of necessity a lord must have someone there who is lorded over,” 69.1-10.

²⁵¹ John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, 9 July 1813

talents²⁵². This is a restatement of what was well known to the classical philosophers: the dual meaning of *aristoi* – meaning both the “best” and the “upper class” – perennially raised the issue of whether those who inherited the name deserved it. Jefferson argues that “the form of government is best which provides the most effectually for a pure selection of these natural *aristoi* into the offices of government.” The substance of his proposition is a system of public education emphasizing “reading, writing and common arithmetic,” from which the best students would be chosen and sent to a secondary school. The best of these would then be sent to University. “Worth and genius would thus have been sought out from every condition of life, and compleatly prepared by education for defeating the competition of wealth and birth for public trusts.”

While we have achieved the goal of public education throughout the United States, the system as it stands does not filter the best students. Public schools emphasize the retention of all students over the more complete education of an elite few²⁵³. Jefferson’s plan to educate the best students at public expense could create, as Plato discussed in the *Republic*, a sense of obligation from these students to the state that educated and nurtured them. This sense, however, is lost when all students are educated as a matter of right and not favor. That is, a sense of obligation is contingent upon someone feeling he has received something beyond what he deserves as a matter of right; that the state has conferred a privilege. Rationally, the students who learn best should receive the best education, and so a privileged education should be a

²⁵² Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, 28 October 1813

²⁵³ Cf Hofstadter, pg. 328

matter of merit and not favor. It is important, however, that the state appears liberal and not merely just.

Herrnstein and Murray argue that education in the United States has become exceptionally meritocratic. It is true that there are far more options open to high achieving students in terms of scholarships and financial aid. This view, however, appeals to justice. The student performs well, and is rewarded commensurate with his or her achievements. In most cases, scholarships are awarded by particular institutions, such as individual foundations, grants, or the universities themselves. Even when this money is ultimately derived from public sources, there is no firm psychological link between the public largesse and financial support. The state thus squanders its opportunity to receive gratitude from these students; in fact, as Linda S. Gottfredson points out, gifted students often feel resentment when placed in mixed-ability classrooms²⁵⁴. Gifted students are often expected to serve as “tutors or workhorses,” whose own intellectual needs are considered secondary to those of the class as a whole.

Such thinking reflects the common prejudice that the best minds can tend to themselves²⁵⁵. Because gifted children are capable of mastering a variety of academic tasks at an early age and with little or no supervision, it is easy enough to assume that they will continue to develop without outside intervention. Public education thus becomes, at best, day care that keeps gifted children occupied until they can

²⁵⁴ Linda S. Gottfredson, “The Science and Politics of Intelligence in Gifted Education” in *Handbook of gifted education*, pg. 24

²⁵⁵ Cf Gottfredson, pg. 30

matriculate to a more rigorous academic environment. This sentiment among some educators may be due, in part, to a misunderstanding of Rousseau²⁵⁶, whose *Emile: Or On Education* remains influential today. Rousseau writes in the *Emile*: “Only ordinary men need to be raised; their education ought to serve as an example only for that of their kind. The others raise themselves in spite of what one does.”²⁵⁷ Allan Bloom’s note for this passage states “*Confessions* is the description of the education of a genius.” To be sure, neither Rousseau nor Bloom would argue that genius cannot be stultified²⁵⁸, but that the education of the genius has a different form and object from that of the common mind.

It would be unthinkable to attempt Jefferson’s project as he laid it out, because to do so would require the elimination of universal education. It is well within our power, however, to improve gifted education. Though a liberal education should be considered important for all students, it is especially so for the gifted. Americans are most comfortable with intelligence used in service of practical ends, that is, education in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). The general expectation is that such an education is beneficial to American society as a whole. Scientific advancement serves our national pride in the same way that the space program redeemed American technical prowess vis-à-vis sputnik. Scientific progress is

²⁵⁶ The theme is recurrent. See, for example, Galton, *Hereditary Genius*, pp. 21-22

²⁵⁷ Rousseau, *Emile: Or On Education*, pg. 52. Also see the *First Discourse*, in which Rousseau argues that “Those whom nature destined to be her disciples needed no teachers” (pg. 21).

²⁵⁸ Rousseau continues in the *First Discourse*: “Ordinary Teachers would only have restricted their understanding by confining it within the narrow capacity of their own.”

valuable to human beings insofar as it makes our lives more comfortable, leads to medical advances, and produces interesting products. We recognize science and innovation as drivers of our macroeconomic interests, as the products we export become increasingly technologically sophisticated, and we also expect that the pursuit of a technology-centered education helps to guarantee individual prosperity. Not, as Marcuse suggested, through reducing the burdens of labor, but because most lucrative fields require at least technical proficiency and many require specialist technology training.

Last and not least, we seem to expect that these fields are intellectually satisfying to bright minds, and provide them with creative outlets or worthwhile puzzles to solve. All of this encourages promising students to look out for their own pecuniary interests and to pursue careers that promise the most financially. If one views oneself as assisting the nation, or helping other human beings, to what extent does one do so in the context of a comprehensive evaluation of what would be most beneficial? To be sure, a generation of scientists and engineers is not competent to lead the nation politically, even if avant-garde technological leadership relentlessly shapes and influences our culture through the introduction of innovative products and technologies.

STEM-centered education does not prepare the brightest minds for political life. The kind of rigorous education that used to be required of even moderately talented youths of means seems outdated today, though some schools have adopted curricula based on the *trivium* and *quadrivium*. Embracing classical education, however, does not address the whole problem. Economic realities demand

technological proficiency, and it would be foolhardy to deny gifted students the opportunity to pursue careers in those fields and rely on technical skill to make a living if compelled. Gifted students would need to be educated apart from others and held to a higher standard. Since gifted students are generally able to more quickly grasp materials designed for mainstream classrooms, it is reasonable to expect that they would be able to keep up with the increased science and mathematics requirements of modern education while still receiving a classical education.

James R. Flynn raises important questions about the observation that IQ scores seem to be increasing over time – the so-called “Flynn effect.” Since IQ is a relative rather than absolute measure, any given IQ test must be normed against the population to which it is administered. As such, the average score is always 100 for any normed population. Something interesting occurs when one compares the norms over time, however: the actual performance on IQ tests has improved over time. As Flynn points out, it would seem that if we judged our great grandparents from 1900 based on the norms of today, the average score would be between 50 and 70, meaning that the average person in 1900 would be considered mentally retarded today²⁵⁹.

Flynn maintains that the weight of the evidence insists that IQ does approximate what we think of as intelligence²⁶⁰, but that intelligence as we understand it is largely abstract reasoning²⁶¹. This has important explanatory power for Flynn, because it allows him to justify IQ increases as real, important, and actual

²⁵⁹ James R. Flynn, *What is Intelligence?*, pg. 9

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pg. 55

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 172-176

improvements in intelligence while solving the paradox that our ancestors would seem to be, on average, mentally retarded according to today's norms. Our ancestors – at least those in the early 1900s – lived in a world that mostly required concrete reasoning, and their minds and brains were adapted to this particular environment. Since they were adapted to their environment and could function well within it, they cannot be characterized as being mentally retarded. What Flynn strangely omits is the intensely abstract education the students of Socrates and Plato seemed to undergo²⁶². While Flynn points out that we must consider cultural forces as a whole, of which educational methods are at most a small part, as drivers of intelligence gains, it is worth considering the kind of mind that might be produced by the kind of rigorous searching, classifying, and rational argument that Plato advocated in the Academy. Even more so, it is worth wondering what a society would look like if it normalized rational argumentation so that it permeated the culture, rather than being confined to the academy.

Flynn suggests devising new tests that measure critical acumen and wisdom in addition to intelligence²⁶³, with the aim that scientific categories must not merely be incorporated into educated language, but also understood intelligently. The integration of a scientific worldview would furnish the tools to more intelligently debate moral and social questions²⁶⁴. This is Flynn's partial answer to the question of whether scientific progress implies or can be translated into moral progress. Flynn

²⁶² Plato's *Sophist* gives an example.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, pg. 161

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pg. 146

generally disagrees with the Straussian approach to this question, because he feels it gives an incomplete prescription. The Straussians, according to Flynn, encourage a return to classical philosophy without actually refuting ethical skepticism or providing an explanation of what we should expect to find in classical philosophy²⁶⁵. Flynn's suggestion is that ethical skepticism can be exposed as a logical error, and we can teach the kind of logical and statistical thinking that would allow students to think through ethical questions rationally.

As Plato and Aristotle teach us, it is imperative that our leaders are reared with attention to ethics and moral values. Flynn's suggestion of testing for what he calls SHAs, or "shorthand abstractions," is a way to gauge the moral education of older students. Flynn only suggests the test, however, not the means by which the student is educated in these abstractions. It would be incompatible with both our current pluralistic values and with philosophy to rely on religious instruction to educate young minds, but ethical teaching at the earliest ages has been traditionally taught through the use of fables. Such fables would need to be taught by teachers who would then be able to engage the students in ethical thinking. As students mature, it is appropriate to bring in the kinds of abstractions that Flynn recommends.

We might rely on various tests of virtue, as well. One excellent contemporary example is the so-called "marshmallow test," in which a child is offered a marshmallow now, or if he is able to wait for a predetermined length of time, two marshmallows later. Those children who were able to delay gratification tended to do

²⁶⁵ Flynn, *Where Have All the Liberals Gone?*, pg. 220

well in life according to a variety of measures, including SAT scores and educational attainment²⁶⁶. The test is not infallible – children from dysfunctional or chaotic family situations may not trust the promise of a future reward, and adopt impulsivity as a means of guaranteeing the satisfaction of desire. An ethical education, then, means giving more stability to such children and teaching them the advantages of self-restraint. Xenophon tells how Persian children adjudicated each other's disputes so that they would learn about justice²⁶⁷. Both Xenophon and Plutarch occupy special places in political philosophy as teachers of practical judgment²⁶⁸. Physical and mental tests of grit and determination would also be useful; Rousseau gives the example of teaching an indolent boy to run by having him compete with other children for the prize of cakes²⁶⁹. Physical competition, prescribed by an intelligent tutor, provides important benefits for health and character. Ultimately, as students get older, the best ethical education is a philosophical education. We want our leaders to be not only intelligent, but ethical and moral; that is, to be virtuous as a whole.

This approach would also require education to be treated less in terms of practical necessity. Technology-focused education is both necessary and worthwhile, but devoting one's life to technological progress would need to be viewed as either

²⁶⁶ W. Mischel, EB Ebbesen, A. Raskoff Zeiss, "Cognitive and attentional mechanisms in delay of gratification."

²⁶⁷ Xenophon, *The Education of Cyrus*, pp. 24-25, 1.2.6-10; especially important is Cyrus' ability to see the defects in the law that does not take into account individual differences, and the law's relationship to justice (pg. 32, 1.3.16-17).

²⁶⁸ See David Levine, "The Forgotten Faculty: The Place of Phronêsis or Practical Sense in Liberal Education (Plutarch and Aristotle)" for an overview of the importance of teaching politics through Plutarch.

²⁶⁹ *Emile*, Book II, pp. 141-143

inferior to or less useful than a life of public service. Machiavelli is correct that ambition is natural to human beings, but we have channeled most of this ambition into business, law, and technology. The term “career politician” is often used derisively to promote someone who is ostensibly an outsider and can therefore be relied upon to do what is right as opposed to what seems politically expedient. In this characterization we exalt moral character as the essential qualification of a representative of the people and deny or deride the idea that there is such a thing as statesmanship or political knowledge. It is no wonder, then, that gifted children turn their intellects to those careers for which they are able to gain the most money as well as praise.

Heritability, Race, and IQ

Up until now I have limited my discussion of heritability and avoided race altogether. Instead, I have concentrated on the differences between individuals, no matter how they may come about, with the underlying argument that intelligence is normally distributed throughout a population and is immutable. This position requires a justification.

IQ seems to be highly heritable, but not perfectly so²⁷⁰. If it were entirely heritable and immutable – that is, if chance or environment did not contribute at all to the differences in intelligence within a population – then suggesting that high IQ individuals should be groomed for politics would be tantamount to creating a

²⁷⁰ Ulric Neisser et al, “Intelligence: Knowns and Unknowns,” pg. 85

hereditary aristocracy. The more intelligence seems to be due to random differences between individuals, the more such a system would appear to be designating an aristocracy by lot. If, however, the majority of differences are due to environment, we are faced with a different kind of injustice. IQ is normally distributed throughout a population, and there is no known intervention that increases individual IQ; Susanne M. Jaeggi's approach of working memory training appeared to have promise²⁷¹, but her early success does not seem to be reproducible²⁷². That is, while intelligence in a population may be mutable, there is no known mechanism to significantly improve IQ scores in individuals.

If individual IQ were entirely changeable – if individual talents were entirely based upon environment – then we would have to adopt a different approach. In that case, we would need to find out exactly what kind of environmental enrichment is necessary to yield the highest IQ scores and make such an environment available as widely as possible. We would also need to determine whether IQ still corresponded with what we think of as intelligence after the intervention is applied. That is, we would need to find a solution that raises actual intelligence and not merely one's ability to score well on an IQ test. Such a result would radically change not only our politics, but the world itself, and it would obviate the notion of IQ altogether. Unfortunately, there is no evidence that such an intervention exists.

²⁷¹ Susanne M. Jaeggi et al, "Improving fluid intelligence with training on working memory"

²⁷² Redick, Thomas S. et al, "No evidence of intelligence improvement after working memory training: A randomized, placebo-controlled study."

Because the heritability of IQ is such a contentious topic, and because there is no clear cut genetic or environmental explanation for the differences in intelligence between individuals, I must remain agnostic on the issue. Instead, I argue that the mere fact that there are differences in intelligence, and that these differences have practical consequences for our abilities to think problems through, predisposes some people to be in a better position to rule than others. This result holds whether or not IQ is heritable. In an otherwise homogeneous culture, such a result would probably not be very objectionable. However, there is a long history of using science to justify racial ideology, as Stephen J. Gould took pains to point out; there is also significant evidence of differences in IQ between ethnic populations²⁷³.

Herrnstein and Murray's *The Bell Curve* has received most of its criticism as a result of its inclusion of a chapter arguing that there is a large average difference (about one standard deviation) between the IQs of African Americans and Whites²⁷⁴. Much of this criticism is undoubtedly due to the fact that they ascribe this difference to genetic factors rather than differences in environment. The data appear sound: whatever the cause, African Americans do tend to score lower on IQ tests than white Americans. The fact that IQ is highly heritable within a group, however, does not imply that differences between groups are also due to genetic variation. A population uniformly deprived of nutrients might have a mean male height of five feet, and the differences between members of that population may be entirely due to genetic difference. Another population with no nutritional deficits might have a mean male

²⁷³ Neisser et al, pp. 92-94

²⁷⁴ Herrnstein and Murray, *The Bell Curve*, Ch. 13

height of six feet, with all variation ascribed to genetic differences. However, the difference in mean height *between the two populations* may be entirely environmental, despite the exceptionally high heritability of height *within* each population. This fact should make us hesitate to conclude that ethnic differences in IQ are due to genetic, rather than environmental, effects. James R. Flynn suggests that if IQ is, in part, driven by wide cultural forces, African Americans may be subjected to impoverished intellectual environments throughout their lives in such a way that educational initiatives alone cannot hope to counteract²⁷⁵. Flynn's model seems more plausible than the genetic explanation because there is no known set of genes that would explain the difference, and because of its explanatory power; the same kinds of influences that explain the Flynn effect would also explain ethnic differences in IQ.

If the so-called Black/White difference in IQ is real, then selecting a ruling class based on IQ would disproportionately disadvantage most minorities in the United States. On this important problem, I have two suggestions. The first is that we make it a political priority to improve the cognitive environment for minorities. The second is that, in the meantime, we treat between-group differences of IQ as incommensurable. That is, if we select students from the 98th or 99th percentiles as gifted students, we do so based upon the distribution of IQs in each group. We would then take the top students from the African American population, the white population, Hispanics, and so on. The counterargument to this scheme is that, if differences in IQ have real significance, one is intentionally selecting less intelligent

²⁷⁵ James Flynn, *Where Have All the Liberals Gone?*, pp. 97-111

students from populations that have lower mean IQs. However, I refer back to Jefferson's letter to John Adams. Jefferson did not suggest that we take the best subjects from a national pool of candidates; rather, he suggested dividing counties into wards each containing a school, and from each school the best subjects would be chosen. That is, each population furnishes its own best students who can best represent it through public office.

Toward Intelligent, Philosophical Rule

It appears that democracy is ill-suited to picking the most competent candidates²⁷⁶, but it would be anti-democratic to suggest an automatic selection of government leaders from the ranks of the gifted, or to limit who runs for office on such a basis. It is perfectly compatible with democracy, however, to educate the most intelligent students with an eye to encouraging public service and thereby flooding the market with candidates having the best minds available. Such an approach recognizes that there are other qualities attractive in a representative of the people, such as charisma and emotional intelligence. It would be indulging in the compensating skills fallacy to suggest that gifted individuals are less likely, as a group, to have these qualities in the absence of empirical evidence to the contrary. On the other hand, human beings may excel in areas other than intelligence, and should be able to compete to rule on that basis. Overall, however, there is no reason to

²⁷⁶ Cf. Mato Nagel, "A Mathematical Model of Democratic Election," pg. 257

believe that intelligent individuals are any less empathetic, emotionally intelligent, or have any lesser propensity to leadership than the population in general²⁷⁷.

If the best students are raised to value public service, then it seems more likely that they will become public servants. Clearly, such a plan would not guarantee that all politicians come from the natural aristocracy; even Jefferson acknowledged that the pseudo-aristocracy had sufficient means to provide its own representation. However, neither would the scheme require that all politicians are the brightest. Following Flynn, a culture that values rigorous argument and thought – in ethics and all areas of life – is a rising tide that elevates our political discourse. Even if that fails, however, ensuring that some of the brightest minds have key political positions provides a hope of creating a scientific work group, as Bion describes.

In fact, there is some evidence that for certain kinds of problems, small groups seem to perform better than individuals²⁷⁸. Laughlin et al proposed four criteria under which the group is able to perform at this heightened level: “(1) group consensus on a conceptual system; (2) sufficient information; (3) incorrect members are able to recognize the correct response if it is proposed; (4) correct members have sufficient ability, motivation, and time to demonstrate the correct response to the incorrect members.” Critically, the high performance of small groups relies upon high demonstrability in the tasks chosen. Mathematical results that can be proven correct by a demonstrating group member are more likely to be accepted by other group

²⁷⁷ Cf Albert Mehrabian, “Beyond IQ: Broad-based measurement of individual success potential or “emotional intelligence””

²⁷⁸ Patrick R. Laughlin et al, “Groups perform better than the best individuals on Letters-to-Numbers problems”

members. Where tasks required individual discretion or judgment, however, group performance suffered. Group members were asked to rank objects for usefulness for a group of downed astronauts on the moon, and their results were compared with the ordering provided by NASA experts. Since the task was less intellectual and the answers were less clearly demonstrable, groups performed at the level of the second-best member²⁷⁹. However, the given tasks required only elementary arithmetic and logic. The results seem to hold as a function of demonstrability, rather than confidence or charisma²⁸⁰.

Laughlin's research reminds us of Machiavelli's dueling speakers, each attempting to persuade the people that his proposed course of action is the better. Unfortunately, the political is not demonstrable in the same way that simple mathematical puzzles might be. But Laughlin's research does suggest that in less demonstrable fields, groups tend to perform about as well as the second best group member. This should give us hope; we cannot expect that a democratic body will always perform at the highest levels of individual achievement. A slight lowering of the bar, however, may promise a large improvement over what we currently accept as the inevitable course of political events.

Western views of intelligence have taken a path, a relentless winnowing that has ultimately left us with an operational definition of intelligence but not a human one. Looking at intelligence from Aristotle's and Plato's perspectives, we see a

²⁷⁹ Ibid., pg. 607

²⁸⁰ Emmanuel Trouche et al, "Arguments, more than Confidence, Explain the Good Performance of Reasoning Groups"

definite moral dimension; intelligence, as used in practical judgment, is concerned with what is good for human beings. Machiavelli eliminates the moral dimension, and instead emphasizes the acquisitive use of intelligence: by itself, intelligence has no concrete material ambitions, so the combination of old prudence and young ambition provides the means upon which the intellect acquires its loftier ends. The scientific era, however, completely unmoors intelligence from its moral and acquisitive elaborations, treating it as though it were a good in itself and disclaiming any ability to find a definite place for intelligence politically or socially. We should do what we can to restore the pursuit of the good, so that intelligence is once again seen as a means to the highest forms of understanding. At the same time, we live in an acquisitive society, and that is unlikely to change. We should take our cue from Machiavelli that there are many ways to arrive at good things, and democracy provides the voice of the people as projects on which the intellect can work. To be politically salutary, these projects should be more than economic or technological answers to the people, but real political work. A cognitive elite would need to understand its own limitations, as well as the limits of its society, recognizing that the relationship between a leader and the lead is not a strictly rational one, but the heir to longstanding psychodynamic forces.

The approach should be tentative and provisional. If, as Strauss says, liberal education is the ladder to universal aristocracy, it suggests that none of us are in a position to provide a final prescription to the greatest problems of ruling. Socrates himself does not suggest a solution that does not require either remaking the entire polis or creating a new one from whole cloth. It is therefore incumbent upon us as

citizens to provide the environment through which the leaders of tomorrow can improve upon existing institutions and create or rediscover the important lessons of human nature that will take us closer to philosophical rule. Only once the omnipotence of economics is denied, only once students learn to understand themselves as political, is this improvement possible.

Our republic will improve to the extent that we have greater expectations for those we elect into office, and to the extent that those elected prove themselves to be the best in the way that the classical philosophers understood it. We can approach this goal only if we acknowledge that the ancients may know something about the relationship of intelligence to political life that we do not, that they can teach us something that we have forgotten. While we have ample evidence of technological progress, moral and philosophical progress is not so apparent; what we know today is not necessarily better than what we knew yesterday. Ultimately, however, the search for the best rulers must be similar to the way the philosopher approaches morality: we need not have an absolute morality laid out before us, but we must persistently search for one.

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