

Emotions, Populism and Polarised Politics, Media, and Culture -Conference, August 2019

Vesa Heikkinen, University of Helsinki

Unfinished draft version, June 2019

Politics as Change or Preservation – A case of Experts against Citizens?

Introduction

During the 2016 Brexit campaign, the British justice minister Michael Gove asserted that ‘the people in this country have had enough of experts’. Appearing on television as part of the Leave campaign, the justice minister refused to name economists who were in favour of Brexit, adding later that he did not ask the people to trust him in the matter of leaving the EU, but to trust themselves.¹

While this paper makes no attempt to analyse Brexit as such from any perspective, Gove’s words may serve as a way of introduction to the theoretical matter I wish to pursue, namely the distinction between a political society ruled by citizens, and a political society relying on experts and their knowledge in particular fields. Is a claim ‘this country has had enough of experts’ merely an outburst of low-brow anti-intellectualism – which of course is a mode of communication that has a long history of its own – or could such a statement have some merit, perhaps even from the expert’s point of view? The fact that this possibility is raised here is surely enough to give away the leaning of the present work towards a tentative ‘yes’ answer.

Yet, perhaps more importantly, we may posit a further question inspired by Gove’s rhetoric: if the people are indeed right not to trust him, but should instead trust themselves, what is it that they ultimately place their trust on? Merely ‘themselves’ is arguably inadequate, as this could mean either personal background, expertise, or pure prejudice, to name a few examples. Provisional answer offered at this point is that they should trust themselves as citizens, i.e. as they are in their role as part of a commonwealth, giving rise to something that we may call ‘common sense’. This further requires that citizenship be not understood merely as a legal status, but in a more specific sense of a ‘public

¹ *Financial times*, article published online 3.6.2016, <https://www.ft.com/content/3be49734-29cb-11e6-83e4-abc22d5d108c>.

mode of being'.² From the nature of public activity as rational plurality of shared sense experience this article will take its cue to argue that common sense has an important role in Western political history, as difficult as its precise nature may be to pinpoint.

The next step will be to problematize scientific, or expert-driven political rule on behalf of common sense. As a whole, this essay will consider the question of 'citizens or experts' from two fairly broad aspects. The first one has to do with the question of the nature of politics as such, and accordingly the manner in which citizens or experts should be seen as political institutions, i.e. by nature deserving to influence political decision-making in a republican/democratic form of government. Secondly, I will problematize the power of experts by arguing that experts in modern society may unduly favour reform as a course of action, as opposed to preservation. Alongside these, I shall touch upon the role of the university and whether the traditional purpose of educating citizens has, perhaps, recently been replaced by the more utilitarian purpose of training experts.

Aforementioned issues are of course matters of enormous scale and complexity, and have been considered at length recently by scholars in many different fields. Nevertheless, it is my wish that through this modest and necessarily cursory examination I may come up with a shred of wisdom and understanding, in order to perhaps develop a better knowledge of the fundamental questions of legislation and society.

Background: From the Ancients to Modernity

The Ancients and common sense

As we ponder the required elements in a political decision-making process, we could do worse than to turn toward the ancients – here as usual meaning the writings of Plato and Aristotle. In the dialogue *Protagoras*, one of Plato's early longer writings, he has the protagonist Socrates discuss the nature of virtuousness with the title character Protagoras, the old and respected sophist.

The underlying main theme in *Protagoras* is the question of whether or not virtue is something that can be taught. Is the virtuous man, or the virtuous citizen, fundamentally to be seen as a trained expert,

² In Europe and other places, this 'public mode of being' seems to be quite missing, evoking, at best, some ideas of commonly visible media-activity. However, because of the sheer magnitude of their consequences, the various rejections facing the EU in national referenda may be seen as outcries towards this now lost public relevance. Brexit was certainly not the first instance of this happening, and in 2005, Herman van Gunsteren argued that the rejection of the proposed constitutional treaty in France and the Netherlands marked a sort of birth of true European Citizenship – a citizenship that contrary to technocratic wishes did not want the proposed form of integration. See Herman van Gunsteren, 'The Birth of the European Citizen out of the Dutch No Vote', (2005) *European constitutional law review* 1, 406.

much in the way of engineers and doctors? Or is there virtue inherently in people as such, perhaps existing somewhat in the manner of ‘common sense’, in the usual meaning of the word.³

Socrates observes that in the Athenian communal gatherings on the *agora*, speaking in societal matters is most often restricted. For example, when deciding on the matter of where to build a bridge, not everyone is allowed to speak, but rather those who possess expert knowledge of bridges: the engineers. Similarly, when discussing questions pertaining to seafaring, other speakers are silenced but the sailors are allowed to speak. In other words, the ones trusted to give sound advice are the experts. Nonetheless, when general political matters are addressed, i.e. those requiring justice and wisdom, similar restrictions are not observed, but rather, every citizen is given a chance to speak his mind. Socrates draws the conclusion that there exists a general sphere of political activity in which expert training does not exist, but rather, everyone is an expert.⁴

This conclusion may have some merit, at least insofar as human beings as such are by nature social or political animals. Everyone does not know how to build bridges or supply ships, but everyone holds at least some knowledge of what it is to live in a community, and to be an individual necessarily connected to others. This necessary connectedness might function as a fundamental basis for citizenship, thereby serving as the common ground on which general political discussion may be established.⁵

The understanding of men as sociable animals was further developed and laid out by Aristotle. In his view, man is the animal that possesses *logos*, the capability of speech. This means that insofar as man speaks inward, to himself, he is a rational animal; and insofar as he speaks outward, to other men, he

³ It is interesting that both the Finnish and Swedish concepts of ‘common sense’ (*maalaisjärki* and *bondförnuft*) literally denote ‘rural reason’, aptly pointing back to earlier agrarian societies with less differentiated fields of expertise. As will become apparent below, common sense, in its ancient meaning, can be traced to Aristotle, who held the view that human sense apparatus, in addition to the regular perceptive senses like seeing and hearing, also required a common sense (*sensus communis* / *koine aisthēsis*), which made it possible for the soul to understand visual and auditory stimuli intelligibly together, as otherwise they would be incompatible with each other, having nothing in common. A further interpretation, mentioned by Leo Strauss, is common sense as the sensible decorum into which people slowly grow through their upbringing, and by virtue of which one can immediately ‘sense’ an tactful remark or a rude suggestion.

⁴ Plato, *Protagoras*, 319b-e.

⁵ ‘At least every sane adult possesses political knowledge to some degree. Everyone knows something of taxes, police, law, jails, war, peace, armistice. Everyone knows that the aim of war is victory, that war demands the supreme sacrifice and many other deprivations, that bravery deserves praise and cowardice deserves blame. Everyone knows that buying a shirt, as distinguished from casting a vote, is not in itself a political action.’ Leo Strauss, *What is political philosophy?* (Chicago University Press 1988) 14. Of course, we might today question whether the behaviors of consumption have not actually acquired a (fabricated) dimension of political meaning themselves, even sometimes surpassing traditional political action itself. I refer here to various manners of ethical consumption, voluntary payments for flying etc.

is a social animal. It could be argued that the political animal is born once man accomplishes the former, followed by the latter.⁶

However, in practical life the capability of inner speech, of being in concord with oneself, may well be a necessary prerequisite of sound political action. This at least is the interpretation offered by Dana Villa in his book *Socratic Citizenship*, in which he offers Socrates as a model for a proper citizen.

Relying on Hannah Arendt, he argues that thoughtful solitude, our being alone with ourselves (the private sphere of thinking), is what provides us with our basic, and in many ways, most important understanding of human plurality, ethical relationships, and, indeed, friendship itself. The relationship each individual establishes with his or her partner in thought serves as the basis for the kind of relationships he or she establishes with others, including both friends and other citizens.⁷

Socrates, who of course defined himself as the ‘ultimate non-expert’, claiming that he knew nothing, not even the way to the marketplace, is a peculiar and interesting model for citizenship. This is not least due to the fact that he has generally been described as an unyielding nonconformist, a barely tolerated ‘gadfly’, who disturbed the normal proceedings in the Athenian public, and was ultimately sentenced to death.

In Villa’s view, it was precisely Socrates’s human wisdom, especially in recognizing that human beings do not possess any craft-like knowledge when it comes to the ‘most important things’ that defined him as a model citizen. As seen in his *Apology*, as well as in *Protagoras*, Plato had Socrates stand in contradistinction to the sophists, and their rhetorical stance as the ‘moral expert’.⁸ As outlined in many of Plato’s dialogues, under Socrates’ skepticism, the claims of statesmen and citizens alike to moral expertise are repeatedly revealed as fiction.⁹

Plato’s own personal views are of course elusive to us, due to his voluminous materials and especially the fact that the form he followed was that of dialogue. In dialogues, the message is spoken by a character in a specific situation, to another character in a specific situation. Therefore, what is said

⁶ See picture 1 below.

⁷ Dana Villa, *Socratic Citizenship* (Princeton University Press 2001) 263.

⁸ *Ibid*, 304.

⁹ In Socrates’s account, the test failed by Athenian statesmen was whether or not their rule had contributed to the moral improvement of the citizens. What they had managed to do was flatter the people, thus making them even more “wild”. *Ibid*, 15.

can scarcely ever be taken as the author's last word on the subject – in contradistinction to a *treatise*, a form adopted by Aristotle in his *Politics*, for example.¹⁰

Positivism and expert knowledge

The kind of 'common sense', as a non-expert and pre-scientific knowledge, surely lost some of its general appeal following Copernicus and the emergence of a mechanistic world-view in modernity. Expert rule, or technocracy, was proposed by the founder of positivism, Auguste Comte (1798-1857). In the view of the positivism of his time, all genuine knowledge is scientific knowledge. For Comte, science was the third, and final stage of human understanding, being preceded first by theological and then by metaphysical explanations of reality. Following the inevitable evolution of philosophical development, he predicted a world ruled by scientists, which for him, in the early 19th century still carried the old name of *philosophers*. In the new scientific order, men would be guided by a small elite devoted to contemplation. This, strangely enough, sounds similar to Plato and his *Republic*. Still, far from being the philosopher kings envisioned by Plato, Comte's philosophers of the future consisted of technocrats, modern scientific experts.¹¹

All in all, the gradual shift toward expert government has been explained by the rising requirements of specialization among the arts that traditionally constituted the ones closest to politics: statesmanship, warfare, and the judiciary. According to Max Weber, the development of military technology laid ground for the position of a professional military officer, just as the requirements of judicial expertise created the professional lawyer already in earlier history.¹² In the United States, the Pendleton Act of 1883 moved the state to a professional bureaucracy.¹³ Two important points should be noted here, at least. First, the creation of a salaried bureaucracy more or less equated the career in politics and administration with any other professional vocation, adopted out of necessity for making a living. Second, the education – or more precisely, the academic/scientific education required for the career in state administration made the holding of the office itself unpolitical. The neutral application of law or science precludes the essential political element of conflict from affecting the administrator,

¹⁰ The extent to which Plato himself may in some writings argue in favour of a technocratic government – the Philosopher King and the Guardian class in his *Republic* are the obvious targets for scrutiny – is of course notable.

¹¹ We cannot at this juncture analyse the further evolution of positivistic thinking after Comte. Suffice it to say that unlike later *logical positivists*, the positivism of Comte still retained the old notion that value propositions are indeed meaningful, and the whole progress of scientific knowledge has an intrinsic moral element – unlike logical positivists who roughly held that any meaningful statement must have basis in empirical observation, a requirement that value judgments lack.

¹² The courts are the original governmental form of the use of a category of expertise. The courts represent a delegation of authority to specialists or expert judges, whose job is of operating within a set of conventionally imposed restrictions (involving the elimination of conflicts of interest, among other things) to produce technical 'justice', according to rules of law on which the judges are better qualified than ordinary people to determine. Stephen P. Turner, *Liberal Democracy 3.0: Civil society in an Age of Experts* (Sage Publications 2003), 11.

¹³ Max Weber, *Tiede ja politiikka* (Vastapaino 2009), 86.

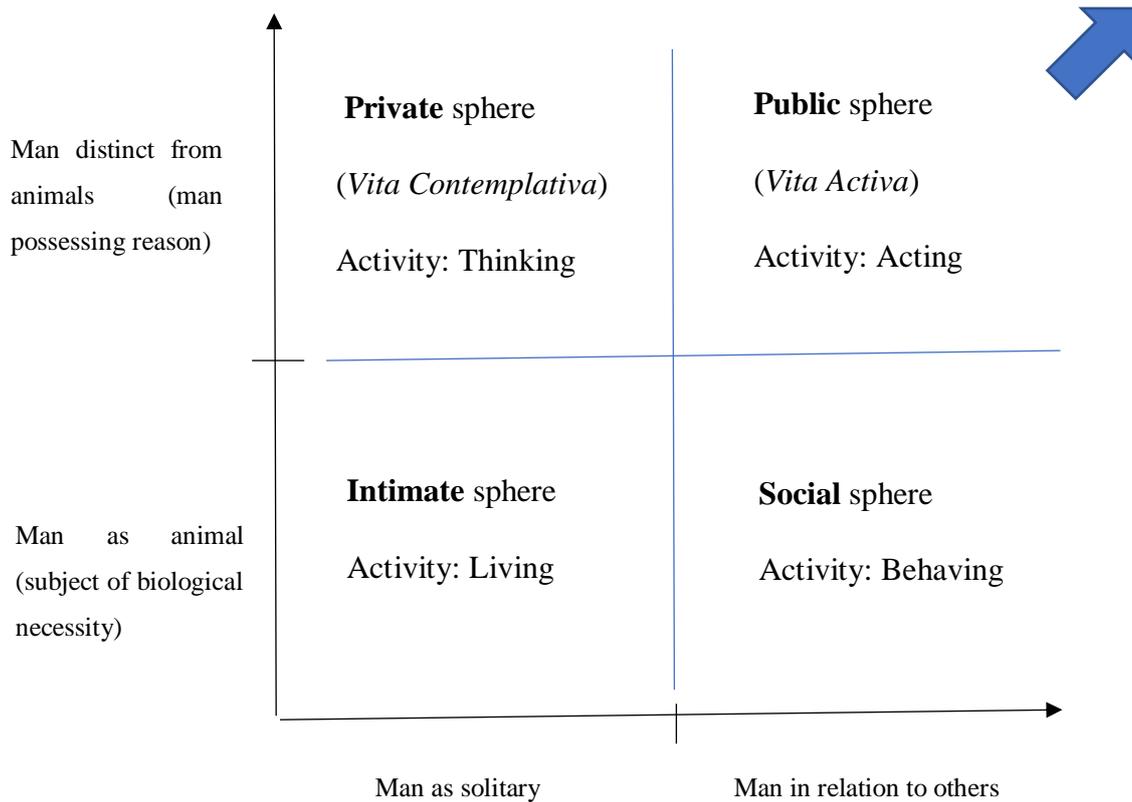
and thereby the holding of an office itself became essentially unpolitical. In effect, what had happened was the fragmentation of the prudential sphere, and the environment of the common sense, many-faceted concept which will be examined below.

Common sense – the origin of political life

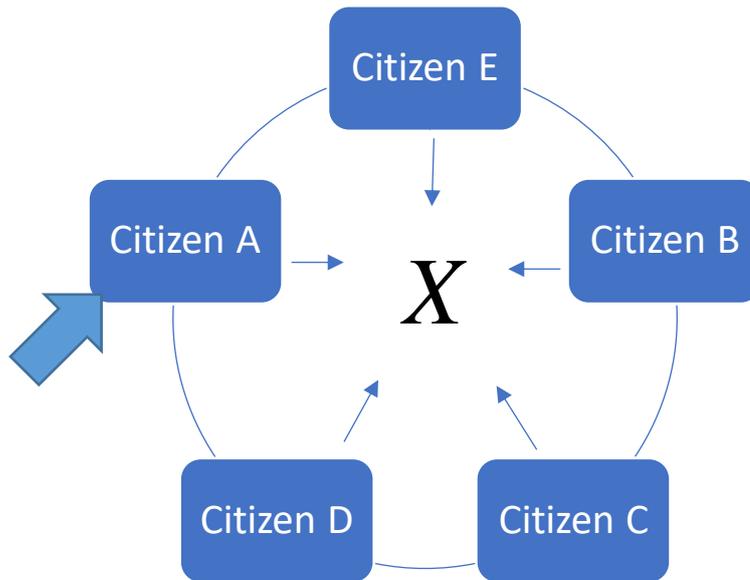
The oldest meaning of the ‘common sense’ (the *sensus communis*, or the *koine aisthēsis*) denotes the Aristotelian idea of the human sense apparatus having a ‘sixth sense’, which connects intelligibly together the other senses, which by themselves merely offer stimuli which have nothing in common – auditory stimuli being impossible to reduce to visual stimuli and so on.

However, another meaning of the common sense, closer to the now popular meaning, is one already alluded to by Aristotle in his *Rhetoric*, and later adopted and developed in turn by Immanuel Kant and Hannah Arendt. This conception of *sensus communis* is one which denotes the shared understanding of a multitude of people. In effect, it retains the problem confronted by the oldest meaning: how to find a common ground through which to bind together a plurality of heterogeneous elements.¹⁴ In other words, the physiological explanation concerning the senses became useful also for theorizing the ‘political sense’ of human beings.

¹⁴ Itay Snir ‘Bringing plurality together: Common sense, thinking and philosophy in Arendt’ [2015] 53(3) *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 362.



Picture 1. An anthropological interpretation of the spheres of human activities according to Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition*. What appears as a result is a diagrammatic depiction of the four spheres of human activity, which are called here the Intimate, the Private, the Social, and the Public. (*Man as an animal in relation to himself, Man as a rational being in relation to himself, Man as an animal in relation to others, and most importantly, Man as a rational being in relation to others.*) As regards legislation, one could follow e.g. Rousseau and Kant, and argue that the initial sphere of law is in the *Private* realm: 'Man is free when he follows a self-imposed law'. This law is then extended to Public realm through the act of generalisation (à la *Volonté Générale* of Rousseau). The same process can be discerned in Kant's famous Categorical Imperative ('Act only according to that maxim which you can will to become a *universal* moral law').



Picture 2. A simple illustration of a plurality. In a metaphorical sense, X denotes the symbolic center, or the common good of a society (what the Romans called *Res Publica*). In a physical sense, X stands for the common object of sense perception, giving rise to something which may be called ‘common sense’ of a plurality.

Interpretations as to the origin of common sense are varied. Here, three rudimentary starting points are offered: 1) the sensual-rational, 2) the sub-rational, and the 3) supra-rational. In order to move on, we can only take a glance at all of these.

The sensual-rational common sense

In a brief outline, let us first look at the emergence of a *sensus communis* in a physical, concrete setting. In a physical public space, like the ancient forum, viewers cannot occupy exactly the same space – A cannot stand where B is standing. Therefore, even when standing side by side, the view they have of a common object (of a triumphal procession, an ancestral monument etc.) cannot be exactly the same. The full multitude of human beings physically present in a public space then comes to the closest approximation of plurality. Everybody watches the victorious general in the middle, everybody sees him from a slightly different angle. On the opposite side of the forum, C may raise his eyes and watch A. He then sees someone seeing the procession from an opposite angle. This is the recognition of an opposing view. For Arendt, being seen and being heard by others derive their significance from the fact that everyone sees and hears from a different position.

In public activity, where everyone involved is present in a physical sense, the understanding of one’s position as a part of the whole arises naturally. In a metaphorical sense, this position means that having left the public space, a citizen still retains an understanding of a position as a part of the whole

(as illustrated in Picture 2 above). However, as a result of Modernity and scientific positivism, the predominant view of reality became detached from ordinary senses, and instead a mediated world of telescopes and externalized viewpoint rose to hold sway. Yet, the fruitful use of telescopes in one pursuit and microscopes in another do not fully exhaust meaningful human perspectives, and they do not entitle one to deny that there are things which may be seen as what they are only if they are seen with the unarmed eye; or, more precisely, if they are seen in the perspective of the citizen, as distinguished from the perspective of the scientific observer.¹⁵ What emerged due to this is the process of *alienation*. According to Arendt, the result of alienation is that people have lost both the physical meaning of common sense – of sensing the same things from differing viewpoints – and the political meaning of it. As a result, the opposite of sense, namely stupidity, arises.¹⁶

From this perspective, one of the difficulties we face today with very large-scale global phenomena is that they as such cannot be commonly sensed. The effects of the climate change, for example, appear sporadically and regionally in various ways but as a member of my community I can scarcely experience climate change with my fellow men in the manner that I can experience a single thunderstorm. Because events appear to us in the modern world in an increasingly mediated form, through newspapers, television and especially the internet, a common sense that arises in a physical plurality rarely becomes apparent, but rather, everyone reads and reacts as an isolated individual, being together with nothing except the media device.¹⁷

The sub-rational common sense

In order to delve deeper in to the composition of *sensus communis* we will have to relinquish, paradoxically enough, the normally ‘common-sensical’ world, and look toward the symbolic and the unconscious. In short, this denotes the approach which holds that it is not mere habituation to an environment in a rational manner that embeds an individual in a community or group. Fairly recently, Chantal Mouffe lamented in her *For a left Populism* the frequent rejection of Freudian analysis among

¹⁵ Strauss (n 6), 25.

¹⁶ Snir (n 14), 377. Further, Arendt argues that Science ‘is but an enormously refined prolongation of common-sense reasoning in which sense illusions are constantly dissipated just as errors in science are corrected’. This is why ‘no matter how far their theories leave common-sense experience and common-sense reasoning behind, they must finally come back to some form of it or lose all sense of realness in the object of their investigation’. That is to say, even when science reveals mistakes in the everyday view of the world, and tries to understand the world in a different way from that through which most people usually perceive it, it must maintain some sort of affinity to common sense in order to be meaningful. See *Ibid*, 371.

¹⁷ Possibly a better example of a major crisis that is completely alienated from sensual experience is the post-2015 immigration crisis in Europe. Despite heavy media presentation and political upheaval that gave birth to entire parties in the political sphere, I for one fail to remember a single instance where the immigration crisis appeared to be in an unmediated sensual experience. This is not to say that the crisis was non-existent, or invisible to everyone, but that for a large majority of Europeans the crisis was something they read about in the papers.

left wing scholars and argued that the individual human mind necessarily includes areas which are not conscious. In her view, the incapability of many left-wing scholars to properly appreciate the manifold structure of the human mind is due to their clutching on to the rationalistic, transparent ego of what we could here call the *homo economicus*. All in all, the importance of affects and emotions as separate from rational calculation in the birth of a political multitude rests with this notion.¹⁸

In the symbolic, or metaphorical space, the *sensus communis* may be based on the mythical or symbolic tradition of a community, which, if we believe Max Weber, in turn may be the outcome of a charismatic leader establishing that tradition. To put the plurality around an established mythical tradition in succinct words, it serves us to quote Edward Shils:

*Society has a center. There is a central zone in the structure of society [...] The central zone is not, as such, a spatially located phenomenon. It almost always has a more or less definite location within the bounded territory in which the society lives. Its centrality has, however, nothing to do with geometry and little with geography. The center, or the central zone, is a phenomenon of the realm of values and beliefs. It is the center of the order of symbols of values and beliefs, which govern the society [...] The center is also a phenomenon of the realm of action. It is a structure of activities, of roles and persons, within the network of institutions. It is in these roles that the values and beliefs which are central are embodied and propounded.*¹⁹

The supra-rational common sense

The importance of affects and subconscious elements in political life are thus one manner of approaching the composition of common sense. This approach is characteristic of Modernity and owes a great deal to both Rousseau (with the doctrine of the original state of nature lost in modern society), and Freud, who gave birth to an entirely new field of study in his psychoanalytical theories. For both, the human mind is always ill at ease in society, this being the force behind the irrational, or subconscious elements in political life.

However, before Modernity, there existed both in the classical Greek philosophy and the medieval scholastic tradition a doctrine according to which the *ratio*, or the *logos*, is not the only nor the highest aspect of the human reason. Namely, the Greek idea of *Nous*, Latinized as *intellectus* by scholastics such as Thomas Aquinas, was considered even higher. Whereas the *ratio* denotes the power of

¹⁸ Chantal Mouffe, *For a Left Populism* (Verso 2018), 42.

¹⁹ Quoted in S. N. Eisenstadt, *Introduction*, in Eisenstadt, S.N. (ed.) & Weber, Max, *On Charisma and Institution Building* (University of Chicago Press 1968), xxx.

discursive, logical thought, of searching and of examination, of abstraction, of definition and drawing conclusions, the *intellectus* consists of an intuitive form of understanding. Much like the unmediated manner of sense perception, the *intellectus* perceives (or even *receives*) the truth in the way that a viewer perceives a landscape. For the scholastics, the full human reason consisted of both *ratio* and *intellectus* working in unison, with the mode of discursive thought being accompanied and impregnated by an effortless awareness, the contemplative vision of the *intellectus*, which is not actively seeking or calculating, but remains rather passive or receptive.²⁰

There can be little question of which of the two modes of reason is uniformly predominant in the democratic form which is based on discursive reasoning and expert knowledge. Understandably enough, the intuitive mode of reason seems suspicious to scientific thought and methodology, and it also veers close to what is usually understood as the sphere of religious thinking.²¹ Nevertheless, the supra-rational form of human reason is an interesting, and probably under-appreciated, area of inquiry when trying to understand the mechanisms of human political activity.

This is especially important if we consider the fact that the *ratio* is the exclusive area of reason which can be expressed by speech. Indeed, as Arendt repeatedly points out, the Greek word *logos* meant both rationality and speech and their relation is therefore indivisible. Both Plato and Aristotle considered the dialogical thought process – the one based on speech – to be the way to prepare the soul and lead the mind to a beholding of truth beyond thought and beyond speech. The goal is the truth which is *arrheton*, incapable of being communicated through words.²²

The aspect of human reason which exists beyond language has repercussions for the understanding of both the individual and the community. Just as a single human being cannot be exhaustively defined by the use of words so it is with the whole of human community.²³ What cannot be defined, can perhaps still be apprehended in one manner or another. This is, arguably, the task of common sense as outlined here. The indescribable element – whether it be sensual, sub-rational or supra-rational in origin – will have to be taken into account. As will be mentioned below, this is not least

²⁰ Josef Pieper, *Leisure, the Basis of Culture* (Liberty Fund 1952), 9.

²¹ A related phenomenon is the loss of societal prestige allotted to the contemplative way of life (*vita contemplativa*) in modern times. The original value of philosophical life has, however, been partially replaced by the figure of the creative artist or genius, following the Romanticism of the 19th century.

²² Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (University of Chicago Press 1989), 291.

²³ The indefinable character of human personality comes easily across when one attempts to use words to describe or define oneself fully – no matter how many hours he talks, a human person can scarcely give an exhaustive definition of what he is as a totality. If this is so, it is similarly impossible to define the essence of a community, or its common good. Josef Pieper, *An Anthology* (Ignatius Press 1989), 65.

due to the fact that Law, in contradistinction to the technical arts, does not owe its efficacy to reason at all or only to a degree.²⁴

After this rudimentary outline of ‘common sense’ as the original sphere of prudence, and in opposition to a fragmented sphere of rational specialists, we will now proceed to argue that whichever of the two spheres finds itself predominant in a society, this will correspond to a tendency of that society to favour, or appreciate, either conservation or reform, respectively.

Political action – Change vs. preservation

What is politics? The answer here must be brief, due to many constraints, but certainly politics has something to do with deciding on common matters. The process of political decision-making as well as the institutions involved may however vary greatly from time to time. In the times of Aristotle and the Greek polis, the arena of political action was larger than today in the sense that it was esteemed much higher in the ranking of human activities, but simultaneously much smaller in the sense that the size of the polity was considerably more limited.

A simple starting point, outlined by Leo Strauss, is as follows: All political activity aims at either preservation or change – preservation insofar as one wants to keep that which is good lest it deteriorate; and change insofar as one wants to bring about something better than the current status quo. Both alternatives presuppose some notion of what is good.²⁵ Furthermore, neither alternative is as such preferable to the other, since the decision between preservation or change depends on a particular societal situation in some time and place.²⁶

Essentially, the simple line of thought proposed here is that technocratic institutions, being based on the modern idea of scientific knowledge as an infinite progress, may unduly favour changes, or reforms, when laying out political plans.²⁷ This argument is a very tentative one, and rests on intuitive premises rather than on hard evidence.

The first supposition involved is the fact that since Comte, the nature of knowledge is scientific knowledge. Then, as mentioned already, it follows that the most knowledgeable people are the scientists. Science in turn is something that can be taught, usually at an institution devoted to higher

²⁴ Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (University of Chicago Press), 22. See also: Aristotle, *Politics*, 1268b22–1269a24.

²⁵ Strauss (n 6), 10.

²⁶ This is also, in Strauss’s view, the reason why political thought as such cannot be value-free, as in the sense of modern positivistic social science. The notion of what is good or preferable is always intrinsic in any stance, wither towards change or towards preservation.

²⁷ For simplicity’s sake, here is made no distinction between merely giving expert advice or using actual political power. Also, the actual motives of experts can of course be anything imaginable, but this question is also left open.

learning, e.g. a university. (It is in such institutions that a human being is made into an economist or a doctor.) Further, science is the pursuit of understanding, and in Comte's time, this understanding was of the 'how', not of the 'why' or 'whither'.²⁸ This pursuit is by nature unending, as it has no theoretical limit. Accordingly, scientific knowledge is constantly changing, evolving into a higher form. Old mistakes are corrected and new hypotheses proven, after which their application into real life can begin. An expert is someone who has received proper instruction in his or her field, and then proceeds to offer his services to society. The fact that his field of knowledge, scientific understanding, is constantly changing, he is likely to favour change when giving counsel in societal matters – if only to prove his ability as a man of science, up to date with his (ever changing) field.

As it often seems that at least in Nordic countries Law is generally taught as a branch of science, having its own 'scientific' standards of excellence, the speed at which changes are expected to happen very much affect law and legislation. Alongside the constant problems arising from too haphazard legislative proposals, this touches questions concerning the very nature of law.

Human beings inhabit a world that is by nature constantly changing, both due to the laws of nature and to human activities. Arguably, the purpose of law is to impose order on that world, thereby making it possible for people to live a rationally planned existence, free of constant strife against chaotic elements. From this perspective, the purpose of legal experts is to sustain and develop the legal order, with a view toward the sustenance of this orderly existence, which, at the end, is the thing that allows men to act freely (from the threat of chaos).

However, as already mentioned, the currently prevalent culture regarding experts often seems to emphasize, and overvalue, change rather than order. This means that experts are called to offer their services in responding to the changes, most often by giving advice on how to reform society to correspond to the new circumstances. While this may indeed be the necessary role that experts play, the overt emphasis on the necessity and inevitability of these changes may undermine the role of law as a stable order (not to speak of the obstacle necessity creates for the classical idea of *free* political action).

As regards law, and to use once more the teaching of Aristotle and Strauss, we may start with the fairly clear observation that societies in our time invest considerable devotion and resources to facilitate innovation (which of course denotes eventual *change* of some sort) in practically all spheres of life. For us it should be striking, then, to read of the explicit skepticism with which Aristotle

²⁸ See e.g. Alain Supiot, *Homo Juridicus* (Verso 2017), 6.

considers the value of innovation, and more precisely, the issue of whether innovation in legal matters should be rewarded. In the second book of the *Politics*, the proposals for a good society made by the city-planner Hippodamus are considered by Aristotle. Hippodamus, relying in his plan rather simply on triads, or tripartite divisions, also offers the notion of rewarding those who come up with new ideas beneficial for the city.

Aristotle is against the idea. According to Strauss, Aristotle's problem with the notion concerns the fact that Hippodamus has not sufficiently paid attention to the difference between arts and law, or for the possible tension between the need for political stability and what one might call technological change.

While legislation can itself be considered an art, and often the very highest form of art, it does not share the characteristic of endless refinement and infinite progression of technology. Instead, law owes its strength, meaning its power of being obeyed, entirely to custom and custom comes into being only through a long time. Unlike arts, law does not owe its strength to reason as such, but rather its purpose is to restrain the passions so that reason may eventually come about.²⁹ The educational function of law, which is still sometimes mentioned in our times, requires stable laws due to the fact that education is a slow process. During this, passion-bred opinions must be counteracted by the traditional and myth-based status of the law. The stability of law rests then essentially on the human understanding of law as a universal order, and on the understanding of this order as primary as regards the many changes that inevitably take place in the circumstances of an individual or a society.³⁰ In short, law is meant to curtail, not reinforce, changes in human environment.

Examples of changes we face today are, to name a few, changes brought by digitalisation, globalisation, artificial intelligence, ruptures in the labour market, various other economic changes, and climate change. In many cases, there is no question that something needs to be done, if only to maintain our planet's liveability for future generations – but this may precisely occlude the greatly varying nature of these contemporary phenomena, along with the fact that often the suitable response may in fact be preservation, rather than reform. What is required to make the right call is not always

²⁹ Strauss (n 23), 22.

³⁰ A policy such as law is settled with a certain purpose in view. For a policy to serve this purpose, it must aurally be implemented in the relevant practical choices of the individuals on whose action its actualization depends. Adopting a policy makes little sense unless it is accompanied with a reasonable expectation that the relevant future behavior of individual citizens will follow it as a standard framework of their choices. Juha-Pekka Rentto, *Match or Mismatch – a study on ontological realism and law* (Ius Gentium Ry. 1992), 149.

the enthusiasm of the start-up CEO, or the rhetorical expertise of the sophist, but the silent self-understanding of the citizen.

What is to be done about experts, then? Should they be excluded from political decision-making, just because they possess knowledge of some particular field? Certainly not, and this would be quite absurd especially in countries where a large majority of people are well educated – or trained, as the case may be. The crucial distinction here is the role of experts *qua* experts versus the role of experts *qua* citizens (who may well possess expert knowledge in some area). To overstate the distinction somewhat: in the first case, the expert is a mere functionary, a hired hand in executing some task specified by the employer, who, after getting paid for his efforts, goes home and asks no questions. In the second case, the expert is a gentleman, a citizen who has a notion of his position as part of the whole, and whose viewpoint is not limited only to his specific field of expertise, nor to the task specified by the client.³¹

This sort of distinction of course rests on the modern separation of civil society and state (or the human participants therein: *homme* and *citoyen*). Around the time of Auguste Comte, G.W.F. Hegel defined the realm of *Bürgerliche Gesellschaft*, or ‘the economy’, which caters to persons seeking the satisfaction of various contingent wants, needs, and desires – in opposition to *Staat* or ‘the State’, which refers to relationships of authority which some individuals exercise over others, not by virtue of market transactions, but through the right of sufficient reason.³² Civil society is thus inhabited by the human being in his role as *Bürger*, who engages in competitive struggles on the marketplace. Accordingly, the state is the realm of the human being as *Citizen*, who is related to others by certain shared ethical understandings or mutual recognition.³³

The latter, political realm is the specific realm where actual egalitarianism may thrive, and therefore citizens in an overtly technocratic polity, being robbed of their chances to influence political life, will grow disinclined towards equality and turn their eyes towards other arenas. In most cases, this other arena is the social sphere, the ever-expanding marketplace of work and consumption. In this sphere equality is by nature impossible – the accumulation of capital to one individual at the expense of another being hard-coded in to the capitalist economy itself.

³¹ The most provocative parable about the expert is the comparison to prostitution: an expert is someone, who (1) having received the necessary instruction in order to carry out tasks in a particular field, then (2) hires himself out to a client in order to carry out tasks specified by the client’s wishes within the particular field. Expertise, then, not differing much from prostitution, denotes the expert as a service provider, willing to satisfy the client’s needs against remuneration.

³² See Picture 1, above.

³³ Steven B. Smith, *Hegel’s critique of Liberalism* (University of Chicago Press 1989), 105.

The currently observed global megatrend of populism is certainly something to be viewed against the backdrop of technocratic rule in modern polities. In one manner, populism is of course the age-old method of appealing to people through the occlusion and rejection of societal plurality – ‘we are the people’ is certainly an effective rallying cry against the enemy, but simultaneously relies on the enemy for sustenance, as ‘the people’ here are only a unity as long as it is perceived against the enemy. The fact that ‘the people’ in themselves may in actuality be far from a homogenous mass is then something that populism (as such) cannot properly address.³⁴

Nonetheless, populism, perhaps also the variety represented by Michael Gove’s comments, may also be characterized by left-wing and right-wing tendencies and organizations alike which reject the TINA (There Is No Alternative) logic of ‘responsible’ politics in a world of neoliberal globalization.³⁵ In this sense, populism may be seen as a legitimate protest against technocratic global governance, and the demand to reacquire the voice that citizens in a republican form of government need in order to cultivate their virtue. If ‘the people’ (lower case) is a heap of individual humans exercising their *bare life*, as Giorgio Agamben puts it, then the best possible function of populism is to raise them to a state of political self-understanding as ‘the People’ (upper case), thereby giving form to what was previously a formless heap.³⁶

Technocracy, in short, can lead to the (faux-)scientific fragmentation of political society, utilizing experts on ad hoc –basis as proponents and executors of given tasks. The experts are there purely as paid workers, in their role as functionaries which could in principle be replaced by any other similarly trained person. They may be citizens, but they work not in that role.³⁷ The *techne* they possess may, in the end, consist of little more than proper use of rhetoric and the apt attention towards the latest demands made by global ‘changes’.

Even in the realm of the University, a managerialist leading class, whose sole purpose is to keep up with the leading trends of quantification and rhetorical gimmickry may be seen to emerge. As a provocative example, Thomas Docherty mentions the Stalinist dictatorship in Soviet Russia, which did not often rely on specific commands, but rather on implicit messages or signs. These were in one manner of another disseminated from above, and then interpreted and put to practice by the middle

³⁴ Mouffe (n 17), 38.

³⁵ Wolfgang Streeck, ‘The return of the repressed’, (2017) *New Left Review* 104, 5.

³⁶ Giorgio Agamben, *Means without End – Notes of Politics* (University of Minnesota Press 2000). See also Pictures 1 and 2 above.

³⁷ Strauss (n 23), 24. An expert is a specialist, who may well use his skill artfully, but his concern nevertheless remains within the field of his specialist knowledge. The citizen, in contradistinction to the expert, is not a specialist as such in any particular field or partial good, but rather, the focus of his activity as citizen is prudence.

tier manager class. When a message happened to be misunderstood or executed overzealously – e.g. too many wrong people happened to get killed – the topmost class could truthfully claim that no such order had ever been given. In fact, the ‘beauty’ of the system lies in the fact that finally, there is no need to issue orders at all: the cadres intuit the general trajectory and maintain their own authority and legitimacy by fulfilling orders that have not actually been given.³⁸

Finally, it is not the argument here that experts are not really be better than laypeople in their own fields. The matter is merely that relieving citizens of their capability to influence – or even rule – over public matters they are left in the position of mere children and are thus unable to cultivate the inherent social capability that resides in them. In the moment that the prudential power of citizens and elected officials is thwarted in favour of expert governance, democracy is changed into a technocracy. The confusion which sometimes arises is due to the fact that *democratic politics* is often understood to mean *democratic goals* – common welfare etc., but these goals alone do not make a real democracy. In the words of Strauss: ‘When you say: I want the greatest public welfare regardless by what means, then you can also resurrect Henry VIII.’³⁹

This point of view is of course one that rests on the Aristotelian tradition and could be contested in favour of many alternative goals, but at the risk of losing the republican form of government. If the *Res Publica* is shielded from common eyes, dissected into pieces of scientific tasks, with the focus on economic competition, and then handled as a matter of top-down managerialism, little is left to the ordinary man but to delve deeper into the latest reality show.

Conclusion

To return to the premise from which we started, all political action aims at either preservation or change. If this is so, the prevailing attitudes toward either may be seen to delineate an existing political culture as either conservative or progressive – if change is stressed, the culture is progressive, if preservation, the culture is conservative. This distinction, however, is not very helpful in our times, as ‘progress’ has become almost synonymous with ‘the good’ after the beginning of Modernity.⁴⁰

³⁸ Thomas Docherty, *For the University: Democracy and the Future of the Institution* (Bloomsbury academic 2011), 119. And going even further, one could surmise that when the environment where these messages are given and received becomes complicated enough, there is no longer a *need for a Stalin* at all. Merely the daily newspaper op-eds (‘Digitalization! Flexibility! Labour Market Incentives!’) and the reverent inter-gossiping among the numerous and unclearly differentiated members of the manager class may be enough to give rise to the regime where the mere word ‘excellence’ (or ‘social impact’ or ‘quality’ or whatever) serves as an unending catalyst for competition in outdoing the others vis-à-vis the government’s latest five-month –plan.

³⁹ Leo Strauss, seminar on Cicero, spring 1959, lecture transcript page 57. Transcript available at <https://leostrausscenter.uchicago.edu/course/cicero-spring-quarter-1959>.

⁴⁰ Leo Strauss, ‘Progress or Return? The contemporary crisis’ (1981) 1(1)Modern Judaism 17.

Following this vein, this paper has sought to outline a spectrum of ‘common sense’, adopting a view through which our contemporary society seems to be biased towards change as a political course of action, while mostly holding any attempt at preservation as either selfishly motivated clutching to privileges or ignorant foot-dragging. The reasons for this are surely numerous, ranging from post-enlightenment ideology of individual reason to more or less well-founded views regarding undeniable changes in the human world, but the one emphasized in this paper is the role of experts in decision making, along with the tendency of experts to push for change rather than preservation.⁴¹

The faith in the progression of society toward ever better forms is something that was absent in the thinking of Plato and Aristotle, the founding fathers of political philosophy. Theirs was an Athens undergoing a slow decay and demise, and it was only at the advent of Christianity that the first view of history as a progression towards an ever brighter future started to emerge in the West. This vision was subsequently enhanced by Enlightenment philosophy, and later by the wonders of industrialized commodity production. Criticism has also followed. Already in the 1970’s, Daniel Bell wrote in *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*: ‘A society given over entirely to innovation, in the joyful acceptance of change, has in fact institutionalized the avant-garde and charged it, perhaps to its own eventual dismay, with constantly turning up something new. In effect, “culture” has been given a blank check, and its primacy in generating social change has been firmly acknowledged.’⁴²

In our day, this faith lives (officially at least) stronger than ever, and political rhetoric, at least since the 1990’s, has trumpeted the global acceptance of human rights and free-market capitalism. The information age makes it indeed difficult to deny that great changes are happening, and that the duty of enlightened, knowledgeable people is to help society in whatever way they can to adapt to the brave new world. At the same time, we who still read people like Leo Strauss, are more than ever convinced that political philosophy has long been impossible.⁴³ The expert cadres both in the EU Commission and in the boardrooms of Goldman Sachs are there to supervise the implementation of the latest economic reform, while the citizens imitate the movements and fake the smiles, ripe for someone like Socrates to appear among them.

⁴¹ In some areas, the tendency of experts to push toward change can of course be contested. Following the Finnish newspapers, one can indeed build quite a contrary view – especially the professors in the law faculty are often the ones to speak out against the latest government proposal to curb the right to privacy in favour of surveillance, for example. Consequently, the highest academic experts are sometimes perceived as the worst foot-draggers against the dawning of a new safe/liberal/efficient society – and for this, we should often be thankful. Nevertheless, the bulging ‘expert-class’ in society at large is arguably still subject to the overzealous progressivism and reckless reformism prevalent today.

⁴² Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (Basic Books 1976), 35.

⁴³ Strauss (n 6), 17.

All in all, the argument that hopefully took its shape along the essay, far from being radical, merely seeks to uphold the fundamental republican understanding of politics as a common striving for a good society. The fabric of the body politic being composed of men in their specific roles – or ‘modes of being’ – as citizens, the functioning republican polity is endangered in proportion to the fragmentation of political society into a network of expert consultants, each trained by what were once called universities, and hired by what were once called public institutions, to promote and execute the latest five-month –plan.

Appendix: An *Essai* in conjectural history

Suppose a person finds oneself stranded on an island beyond civilization, joined by others with a similar fate. An understanding of togetherness, of community, naturally arises. The people form a village, first of, let's say, a circle of tents around a tree, each facing towards the center. The tent is the private space, opening towards the public. What each individual must do, in order for the community to survive in a dangerous and unpredictable environment, is to maintain his or her private space while keeping an eye towards the public, in case something that pertains to the communal interest takes place. It may be said at this point that the individual, insofar as he keeps an eye towards the public, towards the entirety of the community (res publica), is a citizen of sorts.

As the village lives on, tents are replaced by houses and the number of people increases. Private space expands and starts to include a multitude of activities pertaining to family, work and leisure. The window or the front door still remains as the portal through which the individual keeps an eye on the public, and through which he takes part in common decisions, i.e. politics. At some point, however, the expansion of private activities and private space reaches a point when the individual can scarcely see the window anymore – he is deep in the realm of the private, almost as in a cave, and when he feels the natural impulse to keep an eye on the public, to exercise his citizenship, he no longer knows where to look. He has lost sight of the village tree, of the common interest and only remembers these through stories. He may find other windows that face out of the private space, but the village tree is gone, and the core of common interest is lost. As this happens to all individuals in the community, they may each find windows through which to look, but seldom do many people see the same thing. And when they do, they tend to act in accordance with the mechanisms that they have successfully utilized in the private space, the mechanisms of self-interest and the pursuit of property. Thus, the sense of community slowly erodes, and the rules governing public behavior take on increasingly privatized forms.

Another possibility is that the feeling of community may be rekindled through common myths and sense of belonging. When the village expands, and houses become too numerous to all fit around the village tree, and later, when the village turns into a city, and a nation, that can no longer be seen in its entirety even when standing on a hill, the physical representative of communality has to be replaced by a fictional one. From there on, the res publica relies on its representation through symbols and institutions. The nation state, with its flag and constitution, is an example. As time goes on, other variants may emerge to compete for the position of res publica, and each stand or fall according to their ability to direct the citizenly eye towards themselves in recognition.

Bibliography

- Agamben, Giorgio. *Means without End – Notes of Politics*. University of Minnesota Press. 2000.
- Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. University of Chicago Press. Chicago. 1978.
- Docherty, Thomas. *For the University: democracy and the future of the institution*. Bloomsbury academic. London. 2011.
- Eisenstadt, S. N. (ed.) *Max Weber - On Charisma and Institution Building*. University of Chicago Press. London. 1968.
- Mouffe, Chantal. *For a left populism*. Verso. London. 2018.
- Pieper, Josef. *Leisure, the Basis of Culture*. Liberty Fund. Indianapolis. 1952
- Pieper, Josef. *An Anthology*. Ignatius Press. San Francisco. 1989.
- Rentto, Juha-Pekka. *Match or Mismatch – A study on ontological realism and law*. Ius Gentium Ry. Helsinki. 1992.
- Smith, Steven B. *Hegel's Critique of Liberalism*. University of Chicago Press. Chicago. 1989.
- Snir, Itay. *Bringing Plurality together: Common sense, thinking, and philosophy in Arendt*. The Southern Journal of Philosophy. 2015. 53(3) 362-384.
- Strauss, Leo. *What is political philosophy, and other studies*. University of Chicago Press. Chicago. 1988.
- Strauss, Leo. *The City and Man*. University of Chicago Press. Chicago. 1978.
- Strauss, Leo. *Progress or Return? The Contemporary Crisis in Western Civilization*. Modern Judaism. (1981) 1(1).
- Streeck, Wolfgang. *The return of the repressed*. New Left Review 104. 2017. 5-18.
- Supiot, Alain. *Homo Juridicus – on the anthropological function of the law*. Verso. New York. 2017.
- Turner, Stephen P. *Liberal democracy 3.0: Civil society in an Age of Experts*. Sage Publications. London. 2003.
- Van Gunsteren, Herman. *The birth of the European citizen out of the Dutch No vote*. European constitutional law review. 2005(1), 406–411.
- Villa, Dana. *Socratic Citizenship*. Princeton University Press. Princeton and Oxford. 2001.