

Book Review

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Yehezkel Dror, *Avant-Garde Politician: Leaders for a New Epoch* (Washington, DC: Westphalia Press, 2014), 350 pages. ISBN: 978-1935907855. Softcover \$17.50.

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Perhaps the most unusual aspect of *Avant-Garde Politician* is its ambitious attempt to combine global governance and individual self-realization under a common theme. The execution of such a broad dual focus obviously carries a high degree of difficulty. The author, Yehezkel Dror, misses the landing on one of these themes but sticks the other, although not without some wobbles.

Dror's main argument in this book is that the world needs better political leaders, and they must be better in very specific ways that coincide with the unique circumstances they will face. To support his recommendations regarding these qualities, Dror draws on a career's worth of experience observing and consulting for political leaders at the highest levels.

Dror locates his book within the classical "mirrors for princes" tradition of educating political leaders, of which Machiavelli's *The Prince* is the best known example. However, in contrast to the traditional "mirrors," Dror distinguishes his approach by adopting the future of the human species as the main perspective for the new vanguard of leaders. Dror is correct to draw attention to this distinction. The validity of many recommendations in this book hinges upon the assumption that the future of the human species can plausibly serve as the main perspective for avant-garde politicians. Dror does not provide much justification for this assumption, so the extent to which one deems it to be credible will be a matter of personal taste.

With this book, Dror aims to reach a vast audience—"all those who are or should be interested in politics and

policy studies, writ large," including scholars, students, political leaders and their advisers, individuals considering political leadership, and anyone who desires to positively influence the future of humanity (pp. 9–10). In reality, however, the two primary themes of this book—connected somewhat tenuously by Dror's notion of avant-garde politics—are more likely to appeal to two different and much narrower audiences.

In essence, this book has two themes. In Part One—which is titled "Humanity: To Be, What to Be, Not to Be?"—Dror lays out his proposals for the global political structures necessary to deal with the emerging capacities of humanity to transform itself and its future radically through "disruptive technologies" (pp. 19–20). Dror observes that while the increasingly global proliferation of these technologies and the governance required to control them is much discussed, the personal development of politicians equal to this governance task is rarely explored. Thus, in this first part, Dror makes his case for what he calls a "circumscribed global leviathan" (Chapter 2) based on a "humanity constitution" as the institutional means to channel potentially species-ending technological developments into their more beneficial uses. This constitution is to be premised on the principles of subsidiarity and minimum regret (p. 33) and based on three existential imperatives: the survival (of the species) imperative, the species-changing inhibition imperative, and the human-flourishing imperative (p. 47). The circumscribed global leviathan, which "as far as possible" is to be operated by agreement, must be a body that has, among other powers, the authority to enact even intrusive global surveillance systems and maintain a monopoly over all types of weapons of mass-killing and coercion. Dror acknowledges the potential for significant abuses from such a powerful global authority, but he asserts that such misdeeds will be preventable via the leviathan's foundation on the humanity constitution and the leadership of avant-garde politicians.

Dror insists repeatedly that these recommendations for global governance are practical and not utopian, but he does not provide much by way of explanation for how the international support for these institutions

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will be realized in the actual world, other than through humanity as a whole becoming a real community, even as he allows that this constitution in its initial versions will not and cannot be democratic (p. 39). This lack of justification for such strong recommendations is unsatisfying, but this section may still be useful for those interested in the unique problems of global governance and proposals for solutions.

Dror offers much more support for the recommendations he puts forth regarding his second theme: the call for leadership from avant-garde politicians. In Parts Two through Five, he lays out the qualities necessary for the avant-garde politicians who will lead the beneficent global leviathan, argues why these qualities are necessary, and posits how these qualities can best be developed.

Dror describes in extensive detail the various qualities of avant-garde politicians. For example, he provides a code of personal ethics for them (pp. 88–89) and elaborates the core qualities needed by a person to properly lead the new global regimes (pp. 105–116). These core qualities run the gamut from the ability to employ multiple personas depending on context to the possession of creative intuition, to the seemingly contradictory mindset of “generalist-professionalism” (pp. 113–115).

Despite all this detail, Dror does not provide a clear account of how these qualities and ethics are to be fostered. The fact that Dror puts forth his recommendations in this book strongly suggests that such aptitudes can be taught and learned. However, he asserts that education and other environmental influences are not capable of changing our core attributes (pp. 156, 230–231), and he argues that most people do not possess the innate qualities of an avant-garde politician.

In many ways, Dror’s avant-garde politician is highly reminiscent of Nietzsche’s *Übermensch*, and Dror’s efforts to describe the avant-garde politician could have been greatly facilitated by drawing these parallels, although perhaps Dror intentionally avoided highlighting the similarities in an attempt to avoid the same misunderstandings as have plagued Nietzsche. The common perception of *Übermenschen*, which is usually informed through second- or third-hand interpretations of Nietzsche’s writings, is that such individuals would be overbearing, egomaniacal psychopaths. Rather, according to Nietzsche himself, as the unique culmination of human evolution, the *Übermensch* would exhibit the

highest synthesis of all the most distinctly human qualities, such as independence of mind, high spirituality, and refined manners, combined with a strong sense of justice.¹ Similarly, Dror describes his avant-garde politicians as “spontaneous developments . . . very unlikely outside small parts of humanity” (p. 69) and as “these relatively very few radically creative and often daring innovators” who have achieved high levels of personal autonomy from their environments (p. 157). Furthermore, just as Nietzsche recognized that the very exceptionality of the *Übermenschen* could cause them to be vilified by the common person²—that “the good and the just would call his overman devil”³—Dror acknowledges that the unique requirements of governance confronted by these avant-garde politicians would necessarily set them apart from the mass of humanity at the level of fundamental values and often cause them to be misunderstood and even excoriated by the general public (p. 262).

In the modern literature on political leadership, Dror is unique for his (almost) open embrace of Machiavellian tactics as he recommends that avant-garde politicians pursue what he calls “public interest Machiavellianism” (Chapter 17). Dror describes public interest Machiavellianism as “the quality in the mind of an avant-garde politician and the derived principles, strategies and stratagems which enable gaining of the power needed for the extraordinary mission, in contrast to personal purposes” (p. 262), including, for example, the intentional use of beneficial myths when necessary to appease the limited cognitive capacities of the electorate (pp. 162, 256, 266–267). This Machiavellian approach treads forbidden ground for most contemporary political theorists because of the overtly undemocratic timbre of such tactics. Dror repeatedly acknowledges the taboo nature of these recommendations, describing the writing of this particular chapter as “an exciting, challenging but not pleasant chore” (p. 262). However, Dror, like Isaiah Berlin before him,⁴ repeatedly makes the case that, in the context of the unique species-threatening conditions confronted by avant-garde politicians, such tactics can be not only expedient but also morally defensible, as long as one accepts that the public morality that justifies the tactics may be incompatible with but no less ultimate than conventional personal moralities (p. 259). Dror also describes the moral capacities avant-garde politicians will need to get their hands dirty when serving the exalted mission of the humanity constitution

while also being willing to bear the scrutiny and public censure their dirty hands will bring (p. 260). Readers must decide for themselves how persuasively Dror justifies this public interest Machiavellianism.

Although Dror does not give equal attention to the two main themes of his book, both have relevance. The first theme, global governance regimes in the face of potentially disruptive technological change, receives only cursory treatment in this book, but Dror's arguments are novel enough to be of interest to those working in this area. The second theme, the qualities of avant-garde politicians, involves more than enough specific and unconventional and provocative recommendations to engage anyone interested in future-oriented political leadership.

References

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2. Friedrich Nietzsche, "Why I am a destiny," section 5 of "Ecce homo," in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, Walter Kaufmann, ed. and trans. (New York: Modern Library, 2000).
3. Friedrich Nietzsche, Section 382 of *The Gay Science*, Bernard Williams, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
4. Isaiah Berlin, "The Originality of Machiavelli," in *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas*, Henry Hardy, ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 25–79.