

STATE OF THE DISCOURSE

Elitism in Democracy

Du Bois, Nietzsche, and the Role of Elites for the Common Good

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Abstract

The concept of the common good represents those resources that are good for an entire group as a whole, or what preserves what the people or inhabitants of the national community have in common. The “good” are those things that benefit the community as a whole; lead to the protection, sustenance, and improvement of the community. Theorists agree that it is the ultimate end of government; the good of all its citizens and void of special interests. Theories of the common good are discussed in this paper with implications regarding the shortcomings of democratic political institutions and structures. The theoretical framework provided by the political thought of W. E. B. Du Bois and Friedrich Nietzsche are used to critically examine the idea of the common good in contemporary democratic societies. Du Bois sought an objective truth that could dispel once and for all the irrational prejudices and ignorances that stood in the way of a just social order for African Americans. Nietzsche’s political theory was primarily concerned with disdain for democracy and the need for Aristocratic forms and social ordering. He was skeptical that with the demise of religion, it would be possible to achieve an effective normative consensus in society at large which is needed to legitimize government authority. Both theorists agree that the exceptional and great individuals are few in society and should govern in favor of the masses. Based on their example, this paper argues that both authors are suggesting an Epistocratic form of government where those with political knowledge are privileged.

Keywords: Common Good; Nietzsche; Du Bois; Democracy; Leadership; Epistocracy; Elitism

A new research study sponsored by the Faith and Progressive Policy Initiative at the Center for American Progress (Halpin 2006) finds that American voters are increasingly worried about rising materialism, self-interest, and unethical behavior in society. The poll reveals that progressive moral themes about public life have deep resonance with large segments of the American population. They want government to be focused on the common good and greatly value an emphasis on the basic decency and dignity of all people. But in what ways do voters get in their own way of accomplishing their social, political, and economic goals? What barriers does democracy itself represent in accomplishing the common good?

The political theories of W. E. B. Du Bois and Friedrich Nietzsche present a critique of the masses that suggests their obstruction to the development and stability of the common good and the responsibilities of elite leadership. In 1903, Du Bois articulated the position that “the Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men”; that an elite leadership within the Black community was necessary to uplift African Americans and

advance their position in society. Friedrich Nietzsche presents his *Übermensch*, or superior being, as the creator of new values that will uplift society and guide and oversee the improvement of civilization. The current state of political sophistication and ignorance within contemporary American society causes one to reexamine these theories regarding the responsibilities and role of elite leadership and the limitations of the masses and democratic institutions.

Investigating the health of democracies based on political knowledge is significant in three ways. First, knowledge of the masses and political sophistication are consistent elements outlined by Democratic theory as necessities for successful democratic political systems and institutions. Knowledge, educational attainment, and political sophistication have been routinely the best gauges for the success and efficiency of citizens in democratic regimes. They have also been constant themes and critiques of the masses in democratic regimes. Ignorance on the part of the active participants in democratic elections prohibits and diminishes the ability to produce the common good. The democratic citizen is supposed to be well-informed, and un-informed citizens have a more difficult time understanding the complex world around them, the needs of the rest of the community, and ultimately, effectively exercising their democratic rights. Political sophistication, educational levels, and high levels of ignorance among the citizenry have been labeled as decisive factors that determine outcomes in democratic elections. Political theorists, including many of the American founding fathers, believed an educated citizenry was a prerequisite for democratic government, and levels of sophistication amongst the citizenry was the best judge of their political abilities.

Second, the relationship between elitism, social ordering, and the common good are constant, reoccurring themes in political thought, dating back to the writings of Plato and his notion of the “philosopher king” and the noble lie. Democratic institutions’ insistence on civil and equal rights are at the foundation of American political systems and institutions. In contemporary political and democratic thought, the anti-egalitarian viewpoint is all but extinct. All contemporary moral, political, and democratic theory begins with the premise of egalitarianism, which argues for the equal worth or dignity of every individual. There is error in obsessing over this perspective in contemporary political thought. As Nietzsche points out, in a God-less world, the equal worth and dignity of all is a consistent misperception, and the root of many political and social failings. The egalitarian viewpoint is no longer required and certainly no longer objective, absolute truth, except on moral grounds.

Lastly, Du Bois’s and Nietzsche’s arguments for elitist leadership are based on their perceptions of the status and role of the masses in democratic institutions and the obligations of elites. These similarities are significant for three important reasons: (1) The different locations of these authors, Nietzsche in Germany/Du Bois in the United States, (2) the concept of race, and (3) the time period of their writings. In the time of both of these writers, democracy and republican government was still largely untested, thus, the concern about the masses’ participation and role within their institutions is significant. Du Bois was writing as a recently emancipated Negro in late nineteenth through early twentieth century America, while Nietzsche was White, writing in late nineteenth century Europe. Despite these differences, both authors hold similar views and perspectives on the shortcomings of the masses, and the role of elite, intellectual leadership. Additionally, both authors are less known for their contributions to political thought, yet today, their ideas and contributions are slowly becoming more valid and relevant based on their perceptions of society in a democratic state and the current state of political sophistication in America.

Du Bois made his observations as democracy struggled with industrialization and capitalism and Blacks’ inability to be equal participants. While democracy struggled to maintain its legitimacy due to increased class division and the need for fewer workers due to

automation, Blacks struggled to overcome the adversity of being prevented to compete equally in the workforce and vote in U.S. elections. In *Black Reconstruction* (2007), he pointed out how the White working class played an important role in maintaining the oppression of Black workers. Maintaining the oppression of Black workers depended on the White working class's support and endorsement. Yet, their support of racism also hurt White workers, undermining their livelihoods and their democratic rights for the benefit of wealthy, White elites. During the period of Reconstruction after the Civil War, there was a chance to expand voting rights, education, and land ownership to Blacks, which would have created a much stronger foundation for widespread democracy. This was a missed opportunity in American history to overcome these divisions and build a stronger democracy.

Nietzsche made his observations during the Victorian era of contradiction. His writings are placed against the backdrop of the Franco-Prussian war and the establishment of the German Empire and rule of Otto Van Bismarck. Bismarck's aim was to unify Germany so that it might have a seat at the table with the other great nations—France, Great Britain, and Russia—who were dividing the world among them. But Nietzsche rejected politics based on nationalism, xenophobia, and the fragmentation of Europe. Instead, he posited his own “great politics” that aimed at the unification of Europe to be led by a new, transnational elite. Their aim would not solely be to lead Europe but, more importantly, to participate in the creation of a new, truly European, high culture (Drochon 2018).

During this time the German government became more conservative. Social movements that promoted public morality coincided with a divisive class system that imposed harsh living conditions on the working and lower classes. Dignity and repression were contrasted with child labor and rampant prostitution. The society valued the moral character of a person more than the factual basis of his or her assertions. Their idea was that it was the obligation of the upper class to care for and manage the remainder of the population. Censorship of unpopular moral beliefs and ideas was widespread. For example, authors and artists couldn't speak out against Christianity and they couldn't represent overly sexual or otherwise obscene content in their works. In general, minority opinions were not tolerated (Searle 1998).

The concept of race is a central feature of the writings of Du Bois. Race, essentially, informed Du Bois's relationship with his self and the world. *Black Reconstruction* provided an important examination of the role of Black people in the reconstruction of American democracy after the Civil War. He explained that race involves “a common history, common laws and religion, similar habits of thought and a conscious striving together for certain ideals of life” (Sundquist 1996, p. 41). Du Bois knew that racism was the destroyer of the democratic opportunity provided by Reconstruction. He saw the Reconstruction Era as a unique historical moment for people of all races to participate in the uplift of American society post-slavery. Du Bois's political theory centered around economic and political oppression as experienced through the concept of race. In *Dusk of Dawn* (1968), Du Bois highlights how race was used as a tool for a specified group of men to oppress and wield power over the majority human population. In this case, race became a mechanism by which humans are subjectively grouped together.

Nietzsche used the term race in two different meanings: for ethnic groups and social classes. He believed that race and class are identical in the sense that nations are composed of different races and that upper classes are usually of superior nature to the lower. In *Beyond Good and Evil* (1998) he seemingly uses the two interchangeably, saying “sickliness presents itself whenever races or classes that have long been kept apart intermix significantly and suddenly” (p. 208). And again when describing the conditions of Europe he says, “the scene of ridiculous mixture of classes and therefore races, is as a consequence thoroughly skeptical” (Nietzsche 1998, p. 208). He was fascinated by the restrictive caste system of India and Laws of Manu which he saw as promoting eugenics (Nietzsche 1998). One of the

themes that Nietzsche often used to explain social phenomena was mixing of the races. He believed that mixed race persons were usually inferior because of the conflicting, incompatible instincts that exist in them, and advocated racial purification (Nietzsche 1998). He blamed the mixing of the races on the decay of European society and culture. He also used the term race in the ethnic meaning and in this sense, he supported the idea of mixing specific races he considered to be of high quality. For example, he proposed that Germans should mix with Slavs (Nietzsche 1998). In fact, Nietzsche considered himself to be “mixed racially,” which is why he does not feel “tempted to participate in the mendacious racial self-admiration and racial indecency that parades in Germany today” (Nietzsche 1998, p. 206).

For both thinkers, race is not a factor in determining who is elite. Says Du Bois: “present attitude and action of the white world is not based solely upon rational, deliberate intent. It is a matter of conditioned reflexes; of long followed habits, customs, and folkways; of subconscious trains of reasoning and unconscious nervous reflexes. To attack and better all this calls for more than appeal and argument. It needs carefully planned and scientific propaganda” (Du Bois 1968, pp. 171-172). There was no basis for Whites being politically and culturally superior to Blacks, merely based on their race alone. In fact, their fixation with racism and inability to act based on reason and rational thought would need to be addressed to make American democracy work. Similarly, Nietzsche praised non-European cultures, such as Moors, Incas, and Aztecs, claiming that they were superior to their European conquerors (Nietzsche 1998). Thus, who was designated as elite had less to do with race and more to do with one’s abilities, intellect, and the actions they took to move society forward.

Ideologically, Du Bois is understood to be a thinker on the left side of the political spectrum while Nietzsche has been appropriated by the left and right. Du Bois’s stance against capitalism and in favor of socialism is useful when examining contemporary American politics. Du Bois saw this socialist ideal as a point on the continuum along which Western society advances towards socialism. The path to socialism must not be led by proletarians—who are untutored and without the capacity for making judgments about the thrust of civilization—and must be sought by evolutionary rather than disruptive means (Reed 1985). Socialism constituted the challenge to private ownership in “property and tools” and the call for elevation of need over the perquisites of power in distribution of the social product. Moreover, he condemned monopoly primarily because of its irrationality, for under monopoly “it is not the Inventor, the Manager, and the Thinker who today are reaping the great rewards of industry, but rather the Gambler and the Highwayman” (Du Bois 1969, p. 98).

Nietzsche’s admiration for social ordering and human hierarchies made his political thought’s association with Nazism and the type of social Darwinism that reinforces much extreme conservatism on the right of the political spectrum. American history is rampant with the White supremacist thinking that believes European culture is more advanced and superior to Black African culture and thus, segregation and status as second-class citizens is permissible. His disdain for socialism and egalitarian politics has made it easy for many to categorize him as a conservative. Yet, his advocacy for individual expression and rights makes him a champion of the left. He rejected nationalism, xenophobia, and anti-Semitism of any kind. His view that our identities are contingent upon the historical conditions in which we find ourselves has been especially appealing to thinkers on the left. Nietzsche’s philosophy enables the left to destabilize long-standing and seemingly fixed hierarchical oppositions that informed Western thought, and thus influenced later theoreticians in their attempts to deconstruct race and gender identities and expose their fluidity and nonbinary nature. From this perspective, we can appreciate how Nietzsche’s ideas, through the filters of a number of intellectuals and philosophers, have significantly

contributed to and inspired the thinking on the left and fed into some of the values and beliefs of radical leftist politics.

Together, Du Bois and Nietzsche call into question the idealistic virtues of liberal democracies by questioning the fit of the masses and the need for elite leadership to move society forward. What is left to explore is how modern liberal democracies can benefit from the forceful realism and elitism of their thought. This requires an exploration into the theoretical framework behind democracy, and the roles of ignorance and political sophistication as these concepts relate to the fulfillment of the role of government, the common good. To uncover the similarities in these two authors' political thought provides the United States with an opportunity to redefine its commitment to the common good based on the contemporary conditions of its citizens. What can be gained is more than tolerance on behalf of the masses towards their intellectually elite counterparts, but instead a certain level of forfeiture of liberal democratic idealism that allows their commitment to adhering to the principles and values of elites. In the end, what both Du Bois and Nietzsche are advocating for is an Epistocratic form of government in which politically informed citizens are privileged.

Du Bois's theory of the "Talented Tenth" comes into direct conflict with the ideals and concerns of liberal democracies. Du Bois saw his strategy to utilize Negro leadership as the most appropriate path towards advancement. He identified a small select group of Blacks that would protect and serve the interests of Black Americans as a whole. His political thought focused on the ideals of science; the idea of an objective truth that could dispel once and for all the irrational prejudices and ignorances that stood in the way of a just social order. He was particularly concerned about racism, which he perceived to be the height of ignorance and foundation of many of the institutional prejudices that stood in the way of equality for Black Americans. Institutions such as Jim Crow laws, lynchings, and terror against Blacks were increasing and going unregulated. Additionally, housing, employment, and education discrimination represented repressive segregation laws Du Bois sought to eliminate. Politically, Du Bois utilized a collectivist ideology which emphasized specialist knowledge and expertise, and the subordination of human interests under the prerogatives of hierarchal administrators. He believed in the "cooperative commonwealth," or the rational organization of economic life for the maximum amount of productivity (Reed 1985). Later, his socialist and anti-capitalist stance led him to denounce modernization, particularly how it had evolved into the further dependence of African nations even after colonialism (Dawson 2003).

Ultimately, Du Bois petitioned on behalf of oppressed minorities all over the world, desiring for the victims of colonialization to gain political and social self-determination. He was a strong and strict proponent of equal rights for Blacks in America, including full civil rights and political participation, hoping that Blacks would have the opportunity to give all their time and thought to their own social problems. Later, Du Bois was ultimately forced to resign from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), which he helped form in 1909. His suggestion that Blacks participate in voluntary segregation divided the NAACP and ultimately led to his resignation. Economically, he believed that capitalism was the cause for racism and contributed to the exploitation and powerlessness of Black Americans (Dawson 2003). As a result, "separate but equal" represented adequate conditions for Black Americans to prosper and advance themselves as a whole, according to Du Bois.

Nietzsche's political thought is founded on his commitment to aristocratic forms of social ordering. His primary concern is with normative legitimacy of state power. With the societal "killing" of God resulting in the demise of religion, he was skeptical of the possibility to achieve an effective normative consensus among society, writing "How can states in practice have legitimate normative or moral authority when religion is no longer

available to secure a consensus on the “correct” or “true,” normative criteria?” (Shaw 2010, p.159). Any state’s primary need is to be perceived as legitimate. The use of power by the state produces the perception of legitimacy. The problem with secular states, according to Nietzsche, is the ability to distinguish between stable political authority versus an independent source of normative authority. As a result, states manufacture normative beliefs to which they appeal their claims of legitimacy. Thus, one inevitable feature of secular politics is political justification. In the absence of religion or myth, there is no other means of generating normative agreement, which is a requirement for political authority and legitimacy (Shaw 2010). Even if we assume some knowable truths, secular democratic societies will have problems making those truths effective in political life. Thus, Nietzsche’s political argument can be summarized as (1) stable political authority requires normative consensus, (2) normative consensus must be manufactured ideologically, and (3) to preserve political authority, we cannot concede to the state this ideological power because evaluative freedom must also be preserved (Shaw 2010).

The great value of Nietzsche as a political thinker lies in the fact that he forces us to face the radical historical and political implications of the “person and polis,” in which “strength and beauty are inseparable from the good” (Osborn 2010). The proper use of his aristocratic model is not for the purpose of founding liberal democratic societies or institutions, rather, the ultimate goal is to make such societies non-existent, or at the least uncomfortable.

Nietzsche seeks to reposition democracy in terms of an agnostic arena where political actors are able to assert themselves in “dynamic, productive, and creative relationships of domination and submission” (Hatab 1995, pp. 76-77). His usefulness to contemporary democratic theory may derive from his uncompromising anti-egalitarianism, which forces liberal democratic societies to defend their objective normative truths continually and perpetually regarding human equality and worth. Without a deity, liberal democratic societies and institutions rely on the myth of equality and participation of the political, economic, and social institutions to strengthen and enforce their authority and legitimacy, in addition to their use of state-sponsored force and violence (Appel 1999). Unfortunately, in most of these societies, their institutions reflect little equality in their outcomes and structure, making the argument for natural human equality and worth far from objective. Political liberalism’s claims for human rights and political equality are a direct result of Christianity’s push for equal human dignity in the “eyes of God.” For Nietzsche, this ideology presents a form of decadence or bad faith that humans no longer need to indulge. The “ideal love of humanity” has political implications because this defining characteristic of humanity must be identified with the passionate and subjective will to power and domination over others, which is the actual root of all human choices.

Both authors are staunch proponents for the elevation of society and yet both authors disagree on this elevation as it pertains to the role of government and the establishment of the common good. The common good refers to either what is shared and beneficial for all or most members of a given community, or alternatively, what is achieved by citizenship, collective action, and active participation in the realm of politics and public service (Diggs 1973). There are two categories in which the common good is usually interpreted: (1) substantive—the common good are those resources and benefits that are shared by and beneficial to all or most members of a given community, (2) procedural—the common good is produced through the outcome that is achieved through collective participation in the formation of a shared will. Plato conceived of the common good as the “cohesion and unity that results from the common feelings of pleasure and pain which you get when all members of a society are glad or sorry for the same successes or failures” (Plato 1991, pp. 462a-462b). His student Aristotle followed with the notion that the common good is constituted in the good of individuals. The individual good consists in human flourishing,

or the fulfillment of the person's purpose which is the right and natural thing for all humans to do. "Good" for Aristotle stems from the objective facts about human life and purpose. Yet, there is a greater value in the common good than in the individual good. Unfortunately, for contemporary students of Aristotle, the good state requires the common good of the citizens and not the good of non-citizen residents of the city such as women, slaves, and manual laborers who reside in the city for the good of the citizens.

Thomas Aquinas (2003) argued that the aim of human society is not merely to ensure the private good of individual citizens, but rather to seek "the supreme human good"; the common good, which is superior to the good of an individual citizen. Later, Niccolò Machiavelli articulated the common good solely as it pertains to the existence of virtuous citizens. *Virtu'* means promoting the common good through the act of citizenship. For him, it represents the general well-being of the community as a whole through the actions of its citizens. It comes from a free way of life but is not identical to it. The common good is also not synonymous with political freedom. Machiavelli believed that the common good can be achieved by good aristocratic leadership. Freedom, safety, and dignity are merely elements of the common good. The common good is brought by freedom, yet it also includes wealth, economic prosperity, enjoyment, and the "good" life (Machiavelli 1997). For Machiavelli, establishing the common good requires courageous leadership that places the common good before their own advantage.

Later, Jean-Jacques Rousseau asserted the end goal of any state is the realization of the common good. The common good can be identified and implemented only by heeding the general will of a political community; specifically, as expressed by that community's sovereign (Rousseau 1968). Political authority is legitimate only if it exists according to the general will and towards the common good. Pursuit of the common good enables the state to act as a moral authority and solidify its authority and legitimacy. The general will is the one which is directed towards their common preservation and well-being. Rousseau, like Machiavelli, concedes that democratic deliberations of individuals will not always express the general will. Subsequently, John Rawls (2001) expressed the common good as certain general conditions that are equally to everyone's advantage. For Rawls, it is intimately tied with the well-being of the least advantaged members of society.

Neo-Classical economic theory interprets the common good under two lenses. First, the common good arises due to the social gains of cooperation (Dahl 2005). The Prisoner's Dilemma, is a great example. The Prisoner's Dilemma is a situation in which two individuals acting in their own self-interests will not produce the best outcome if they choose to protect themselves rather than cooperate with the other. In the case of the common good, cooperation results in the best outcomes for general welfare. In this case the individual does best by pursuing the course of action that is optimal for society. Second, neo-classical economic theorists suggest the common good represents the conversion of individual self-interested activity into gains for society (Dahl 2005). In this case, purely self-interested behavior often detracts from the common good.

In deliberative democracy, the common good is a regulative ideal, meaning, it is produced and controlled by rules or principles of procedure and not necessarily by outcomes. In this way it emphasizes the process by which individuals justify political claims on the basis of judgements regarding the common good. In contemporary American politics the common good is distinguished between which may be shared wholly by each individual in the family without it becoming a private good for any individual family member, and the collective good which though possessed by all as a group, is not really participated in by the members of a group (Dolhenty 2014). In American politics, where voting is directly attributed to processes of democratic deliberations, the common good is categorized as a collective good in that not all American citizens actively participate in the deliberation process.

Despite its interpretations, most political thinkers agree that the common good is the purpose of government; meaning, it is a good of all its citizens, and that “no government should become the perverted servant of special interests” (Diggs 1973, pp. 283–284). The common good versus the particular good of the individual differ not only in respect of “many” and the “few” but also under the formal aspect of community organization versus the purpose of the community. Yet, the good of the community is the same as the good of one of its members. The common good is realized only in the individuals who make up the society, but it is a good that they could achieve only by the interaction of many cooperators (Fagothey 1990). Political, social, and economic institutions of society are therefore instruments of the common good.

Du Bois’s collectivist vision promotes the ideals of the common good in society. He argues that governments must bring under public direction the regulation and even conduct of industry to ensure an equitable distribution of goods and services for all. This helps make possible the active participation of all members of society in government. The most efficient government is that which is able to administer to and plan for the entire group. His treatment of the Freedmen’s Bureau in *Black Reconstruction* demonstrates the role he sees the government playing in establishing the common good. The Freedmen’s Bureau was a government agency created to provide a support structure for former slaves and White laborers in the wake of the Civil War. As a mechanism of the common good, Du Bois argues, “the Freedmen’s Bureau was the most extraordinary and far-reaching institution of social uplift that America has ever attempted. It had to do, not simply with emancipated slaves and poor whites, but also with the property of South planters. It was a government guardianship for the relief and guidance of white and black labor from a feudal agrarianism to modern farming and industry” (Du Bois 2007, p. 219). Du Bois described the Bureau as “one of the most singular interesting attempts to grapple with the vast problems of race and social condition” (2007, p. 219). In the end, he suggested “there can be no reasonable doubt that common school instruction in the south, in the modern sense of the term, was founded by the Freedmen’s Bureau and missionary societies” (Du Bois 2007, p. 219). The failings of the Freedmen’s Bureau ultimately influenced his political thought. Despite the immense power and role the government plays in establishing the common good, Du Bois still saw the cruciality of elites in this role with the purpose to shoulder the responsibility to uplift the masses and prepare them for self-determination.

Nietzsche despised the notion of the common good. He believed the common good acts to weaken the strongest members of society, privileges the group over the individual, and was the cause behind the decline of higher European culture. Nietzsche observes, “what are the conditions for the decline of German culture? That ‘higher education’ is not a privilege any more —the democratization of ‘Bildung’, the fact that it is becoming common and commonplace” (Nietzsche 1977, p. 5). Great societies have been generally measured, remembered, and advanced via the strongest members. Nietzsche insists that “one must shed the bad taste of wanting to agree with many. ‘Good’ is no longer good when one’s neighbor mouths it. And how should there be a ‘common good’! The term contradicts itself: whatever can be common always has little value. In the end it must be as it is and always has been: great things remain for the great, abysses for the profound, nuances and shudders for the refined, and, in brief, all that is rare for the rare” (Nietzsche 1998, p. 268). For Nietzsche, too much meekness and equality are stifling great individual potential and thereby holding back society. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, he says, “the impulse to justice without the power of judgment has been the cause of the greatest suffering to men. And thus the common good could require nothing better than for the seed of this power to be strewn as widely as possible, that the fanatic may be distinguished from the true judge, and the blind desire from the conscious power” (Nietzsche 1998, p. 268). Thus, for Nietzsche, the ability to administer justice in the hands of the common people results in more suffering

and disfunction within society than in furthering and uplifting society. The common good puts the “fanatic” and the “true judge” on equal footing.

One of the main problems with the concept and administration of the common good is the conditions of the masses; those whom the common good is meant to benefit. Fear and tyranny of the masses is a reoccurring theme within democratic theory where most critiques come at the expense of the behavior and attitudes of the masses. The link between the health of democratic institutions and the knowledge and political sophistication of the public is important in Democratic Theory. Ignorance is defined as a state of being uninformed or as a lack of knowledge. In this instance, it is distinguished from stupidity. Human ignorance is the product of four causes: authority, custom, popular opinion, and pride of supposed knowledge (Bridges 2010). If knowledge provides a sense of certainty about things and has a reassuring effect regarding our place in the world, ignorance can suggest uncertainty and a discomfort about the world. Knowledge and ignorance must be mutually constituting on how they are played out in specific sets of social and political relations. When ignorance is deliberately aimed at, when it is sought by a person for a particular purpose, the consequences of ignorance are severe. In democratic institutions, where there is a moral and social obligation to know, the consequences of ignorance are far-reaching and dangerous.

Separate from ignorance, political sophistication is “the extent to which a person’s personal belief system is large, wide-ranging, and highly constrained” (Luskin 1990, p. 332). All interpretations of political sophistication compare it to political/party knowledge, political expertise, and information, yet includes intellectual virtue and ability to reason outside of political expertise and information. High levels of sophistication are associated with higher levels of education and political activity (Campbell et al., 1960; Converse 1964). Political sophistication is the result of acquiring knowledge about politics. Those with higher levels of sophistication have “chunks” of knowledge that contain deeper concepts than their counterparts (Fiske 1983). Thus, citizens in democracy can only hold elected officials to account if they are able to correctly assess politicians’ performance (Weitz-Shapiro 2017). The democratic citizen is supposed to be well-informed. To be effective they must be informed on the issues, their history, relevant facts, alternatives proposed, party stances, and the consequences of political action or inaction (Bertelson 1954). Democracy requires citizens to make sophisticated decisions although a vast majority of the American electorate is uninterested, disengaged, and ignorant (Katrin-Arnold 2012). As a result, only a small percentage is deemed capable of navigating complex political landscapes.

The forced equality among unequals associated with democracy is troubling to many political theorists. Plato (1991) criticized democracy as “full of variety and disorder,” and “dispensing a sort of equality to equals and unequals alike” (p. 292). Those capable of navigating the American political landscape have the qualities of cognitive complexity—abstract, flexible thought that incorporates different perspectives and makes sense of complex situations. Few citizens enjoy extensive knowledge of or interest in complex political issues (Campbell et al., 1960). The intellectual capacity and participation of voters are crucial elements of successful democratic institutions. There are systematic differences between informed and uninformed opinions and collective opinions are consequently “lopsided” relative to fully informed opinions (Althaus 2003). Rational choice theorists and advocates have largely asked voters with low levels of knowledge or information to be able to make rational choices (McKelvey and Ordeshook, 1985). When individuals with low levels of knowledge receive information about economic conditions, whether personal or social, they possess a limited capacity to integrate information into their understanding of the political world (Gomez and Wilson, 2001). Individuals with high levels of knowledge and political sophistication possess an abundance of

information, and they attempt to broadly integrate newly acquired information with their reserve of knowledge.

The problem is that voters may not be adequately educated to be able to foresee the betterment of the community they belong to, and therefore are unable to cast a vote to that effect (Meltzer and Richard, 1981). Those individuals who are in an economically or socially disadvantaged situation also usually lack political sophistication. Lack of “enlightened understanding” translates into a problem of political inequality (Elff 2008). Voters badly interpret and judge information they do not have. The cost of learning about a particular issue is high, compared to the cost of not knowing that information (Caplan 2007). This really becomes an issue when those ignorant people vote, which they will do, in part, because of the good feeling it gives them, in addition to societal pressure to participate in elections.

In the case of the United States, voters are not educated enough to exercise democratic rights. A population with low intellect may not be capable of making beneficial decisions. Most Americans have low levels of sophistication, and consequently, discard information that is not in line with their strongly felt attitudes. Information in accordance with their strongly felt attitudes is selectively searched for and accepted for “bolstering” (Richburg 2008). Political sophistication, roughly defined as the quantity and organization of a person’s political cognitions (Luskin 1987), is central to our understanding of American politics, and yet recent studies show Americans know little about how their government actually works; only 26% of Americans could name all three branches of the federal government; 33% could not think of one; 37% could not name a single right protected by the Bill of Rights (Annenberg Public Policy Center 2017). Pocketbook voting is more common among less knowledgeable individuals (Delli Caprini and Keeter, 1996). For example, middle-class American citizens agreed to tax cuts of the Bush Administration in the 1990s for reasons of economic self-interest—these tax cuts arguably favored wealthy citizens and were indirectly to the disadvantage of the middle class although many citizens think that economic inequality has increased and that this is a bad thing (Bartells 2005). The American public at large appears to be less interventionist than is good for the average citizen: they favor tax-cuts that have hardly an effect on their pocketbooks but result in reduction of government services provided to them (Bartells 2005).

Thus, order within a society attempting to produce the common good must rely on the benefits of the community being equal in proportion to the peoples’ needs and abilities. It is consequently a balanced proportion between what a person contributes and what they receive from society. Although there may be elite, exceptional individuals, special signs of respect to those individuals are allowed, not because of special respect for individuals, but as recognition of the good order that they represent. It is impossible for the common good of a city to be in good condition unless the citizens are virtuous, at least those who are in a position to rule others. With respect to the good of the community, some citizens are virtuous to the extent that they obey the commands of rulers. In the end, the good of the community is at risk in states where the individuals who reside within have diminishing knowledge and understanding of not only the laws and commands of lawmakers, but more importantly, their role in fulfilling the purpose of democratic government. Ignorance of the masses and their low levels of political sophistication make the common good unattainable. This is primarily due to increased selfishness and focus on the individual, an inability to recognize exploitation and corruption, and the rejection of materialism. The common good, as previously stated, represents what is best for all (or most), not what is in the best interest of individuals. Ignorance and low levels of political sophistication reduce the probability of accomplishing the common good, particularly in democratic societies and political institutions.

A certain level of contempt for the masses is a feature in both Du Bois's and Nietzsche's political thought, although Du Bois is certainly more optimistic in his viewpoints in the ideal of the common good and potential success of democratic governments, not only in the United States, but in Africa as well. Both Du Bois and Nietzsche are concerned with creating money makers and believe wealth will not liberate the masses, who should instead rely on their intellectual pursuits and physical accomplishments. These authors agree that civilization is uplifted top down: the strongest members advance the group (society) not the other way around. Says, Du Bois, "can the masses of the Negro people be in any possible way more quickly raised than by the effort and example of this aristocracy of talent and character? Was there ever a nation on God's fair earth civilized from the bottom upward? Never; it is, ever was and ever will be from the top downward that culture filters" (Du Bois 2014, p. 13). In many instances, the public presents a hindrance to the overall advancement of civilization. Thus, the problem in advancing overall society for both authors is the masses.

What worried Du Bois about the masses was not only being "ignorant and unskilled," but also the ills of capitalism breeding selfishness and materialism, which generate bad habits. Hence, Du Bois complains that the masses must be led away from being "so mystified and befuddled by the hard and necessary toil of earning a living, as to have no aims higher than their bellies, and no God greater than gold" (Du Bois 2014, p. 17). Their ignorance and materialism had the ability to thwart the success of the leadership, hence Du Bois's concern with Black leadership "being pulled down" by them. For Du Bois, the masses are not completely to blame for their condition. In the case of Black Americans, Du Bois insists that "the sole obstacles that nullified and retarded their efforts were slavery and race prejudice" (Du Bois 2014, p. 17). As a result, he argued "they have no traditions to fall back upon, no long-established customs, no strong family ties, no well-defined social classes. Ignorant and unskilled people with a heritage of bad habits" (Du Bois 2014, p. 17). The conditions of slavery and institutional racism within the fabric of America resulted in the progress of Black Americans being handicapped. They were not allowed to flourish and develop on their own naturally, thus the rise, and subsequent need, for elite leadership within the Black community was born. And yet, there was still concern from the masses regarding the placement and intentions of their leadership. Du Bois observed, "who are to-day guiding the work of the Negro people? The 'exceptions' of course. And yet so sure as this Talented Tenth is pointed out, the blind worshippers of the Average cry out in alarm; 'These are exceptions, look here at death, disease and crime—these are the happy rule'" (Du Bois 2014, p. 19). And so, Du Bois reminds us, "of course they are the rule, because a silly nation made them the rule" (Du Bois 2014, p. 20). Ultimately, while the masses are in a condition to rely upon their elite leadership to uplift and advance all aspects of Black society, they have been prevented from fully realizing their potential by an irrational, racist American system. One for which Du Bois still expresses optimism in its ability produce what is in the best interest of all Americans.

Similar to Du Bois, Nietzsche believed it was the elite members of society who were responsible for the advancement of all. He maintains:

the masses have to produce the great man, chaos to bring forth order; and finally all the hymns are naturally sung to the teeming chaos. Everything is called 'great' that has moved the masses for some long time, and becomes, as they say, a 'historical power.' But is not this really an intentional confusion of quantity and quality? When the brutish mob have found some idea, a religious idea for example, which satisfies them, when they have defended it through thick and thin for centuries; then, and then only, will they discover its inventor to have been a great man. The historical consequences of Christianity, its 'historical power,' toughness and persistence prove nothing, fortunately, as to its founder's greatness (Nietzsche 1997, p. 9).

Deviating from Du Bois's optimism, Nietzsche believed the vast majority of people are mere chattels who, "in a good and healthy aristocracy should be treated as the scaffolding on which a choice type of being is able to raise itself to its higher task", thereby creating the circumstances for the common good to be achieved (Nietzsche 1977, p. 392). Nietzsche writes, "to me, the masses seem to be worth a glance only in three respects: first as blurred copies of great men, presented on bad paper with worn out printing plates, then as the resistance against the great men, and finally as working implements of the great. For the rest, let the devil and 'statistics' carry them off" (Nietzsche 1977, p. 392). As a result, the mediocre masses "must necessarily be reduced and lowered to incomplete human beings, to slaves, to instruments" in order to facilitate the rise of the new race of supermen and to advance the community to "high civilization" (Nietzsche 1977, p. 392). The once and future enslavement of inferior human beings by their "natural" superiors should be performed with "kindness of heart," since there is nothing "objectionable in mediocrity in itself" (Nietzsche 1977, p. 392).

Nietzsche disavowed any sense of egalitarian community. He staunchly opposed democratic principles, or any form of politics which aims towards equality. In *Untimely Meditations*, Nietzsche writes that "the goal of humanity lies in its highest specimens. Are we to continue to work for these creations and write history from the standpoint of the masses; to look for laws in it, to be deduced from the needs of the masses, the laws of motion of the lowest loam and clay strata of society" (Nietzsche 1997, p. 102)? Nietzsche values hierarchy, noble self-assertion, and will to power. His hostility to democratic values and political structures makes him an adversary of democratic idealism. According to Nietzsche, objective normative truths would not be able to provide a basis for political legitimacy in secular societies because the majority of people would have no means of recognizing it as such (Shaw 2010). Democratic political structures where the masses exercise a certain level of power must necessarily foster smallness of spirit in the cultural and social spheres because they rest upon the belief in human equality.

This human equality for Nietzsche disadvantaged the elites: "we who have a different faith – we who consider the democratic movement to be not merely an abased form of political organization, but rather an abased (more specifically a diminished) form of humanity, a mediocritization and depreciation of humanity in value" (Nietzsche 1998, p. 203). For him, human equality lacks objective truths and so provides no basis for political legitimacy in secular, democratic societies. Thus, according to Nietzsche, resentment, conformism, and the suppression of creativity are real threats in democratic societies. Absent belief in God, there is no reason to accept claims of equal human dignity and worth as factual realities or binding moral principles. It is this dependence on human equality that empowers an otherwise docile and ignorant public.

When ignorance levels are high in democratic societies, elites are needed to establish the common good. In this instance, it is their duty and responsibility to dominate and control the masses for the betterment of society as a whole. Knowledgeable and politically sophisticated elites have the ability to sort through facts of information and consequences to identify what is best for the community as a whole versus those outcomes that are only beneficial to individuals. Thus, they have the ability to produce the common good because they are the only members of the population who have knowledge of it. Such elites see the world and can rely on a plethora of information and resources to decipher political information, making the common good possible. In the end, they possess the virtues to radically change society for the betterment of all.

Some level of elitism, privilege, and exclusion will not only be necessary; without it society could be considered dangerous, and the whole system is threatened. Aquinas (2003) argued if it is good for the health of the human body as a whole to amputate some member if it is gangrenous and spreads disease to the other members, it is praiseworthy and healthy for

it to be removed. If a man is a danger to the community as a whole, it is praiseworthy and healthy that he be removed to preserve the common good. Those who remove the danger do so not out of hate for the wrong-doers, but from a love of charity, by which he holds the public good higher than the life of a particular person (Aquinas 2003). Ultimately, the end is more important than the things that serve the end. Yet, Aquinas also sought to tie the common good to the success of elites when he suggested those that seek the good of many also seek, in consequence, their own good. Elites in society participate in producing the common good because: (1) individual good is impossible without the common good of the family, state, or kingdom; and (2) man is part of the home and state, so he needs to consider what is good for him by being prudent about the good of the many. Any part which does not harmonize with the whole is thereby offensive (Aquinas 2003).

Additionally, the role and responsibilities of elites come to us from sources such as Rousseau's social contract and some of James Madison's contributions to the Federalist Papers. It is the idea that for a republic to thrive, leaders must create and nourish a civic sphere in which citizens are encouraged to think broadly about what will sustain that republic and to work together to achieve common goals. Harry Truman turned the idea of common purpose outward to the rest of the world, enacting the Marshall Plan, creating NATO and other regional alliances, exhorting Americans to understand that they belonged to a community larger than even their country. John F. Kennedy engaged Americans precisely at the level of asking them to sacrifice for a common good with his bold statement, "ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country." Not only do democracies need elite leadership, all civilizations owe their success and development to elites.

Similarly, Du Bois's and Nietzsche's contributions to political theory help highlight the purpose and obligation of elites in transforming democratic societies. Du Bois's "Talented Tenth" concept posited "the Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men; developing the best of this race that they may guide the masses away from the contamination and death of the worst, in their own and other races (Du Bois 2014, p. 3). Who is considered talented and exceptional? "The man who sets the ideals of the community where he lives, directs its thoughts and heads its social movements" (Du Bois 2014, p. 5). The power of this aristocracy of talent was to lie in its knowledge and character, not in its wealth (Du Bois 2014). In support of the significance and need for knowledgeable citizens and politically sophisticated participants in liberal democracies, Du Bois believed that intellectualism and higher education were not only necessities to "good" societies but were the tools that would eventually "win the world". He wrote:

we cannot escape the clear fact that what is going to win in this world is reason if this ever becomes a reasonable world. The careful reasoning of the human mind backed by the facts of science is the one salvation of man. The world, if it resumes its march toward civilization, cannot ignore reason" (Du Bois 1971, p. 583).

This ability to reason is what helped facilitate the elites' abilities. Du Bois made the claim in *The Negro Problem* that "from the very first it has been the educated and intelligent of the Negro people that have led and elevated the masses" (Du Bois 2014, p. 1). Continues Du Bois, "all men cannot go to college, but some men must; every isolated group or nation must have its yeast" (Du Bois 2014, p. 6). The elite Negro leadership will have the task of developing and uplifting all aspects of Black life. Du Bois posits,

here is the path out of the economic situation and here is the imperative demand for trained Negro leaders of character and intelligence—men of skill, men of light and

leading, college-bred men, black captains of industry, and missionaries of culture; men who thoroughly comprehend and know modern civilization and can take hold of Negro communities and raise and train them by force of precept and example, sympathy, and the inspiration of common blood and ideals (Du Bois 1969, p. 195).

Du Bois believed the “Talented Tenth” should seek to acquire elite roles in politics. By doing so, Black communities could have representation in government. Representation in government would allow these college educated African Americans to take “racial action” (Du Bois 2014).

Nietzsche’s disdain for democracy is represented in the illiberal, elitist, and anti-egalitarian aspect of his political vision. His reflections about rank, domination, and nobility are opposed to the liberal democratic convictions that he holds in contempt: Democratic concerns for the weak, belief in the equal moral worth of all human beings, and the desire to preserve and promote liberal institutions. What Nietzsche admires most in the social and political realm is Napoleonic “hardness of hammer” (Shaw 2010); the rejection of the unmanly and morbid pity in favor of “great ideas” and a rank ordering of human beings according to notions of instinctive and aristocratic vitality (Osborn 2010). Pity thwarts the whole laws of evolution, which is the law of natural selection, according to Nietzsche. Liberal democratic societies, as a result, “preserve what is ripe for destruction” (Nietzsche 1998, p. 62). Nietzsche proscribes an unflinching and scientific overturning of the prophetic values of compassion and equality, which are untenable and enervating chimeras. The democratic and liberal values provide too much credit and prioritization of the masses at the expense of the exceptional and extraordinary members of society.

For both Du Bois and Nietzsche, their main political goal is a form of epistocracy, or rule by citizens with political knowledge. It’s a system that privileges the most politically informed citizens. Jason Brennan’s (2016) *Against Democracy* argued that not only is democracy overrated, but it isn’t more just than other forms of government and that it doesn’t empower citizens or create more equitable outcomes. An unfortunate side effect of democracy is that it incentivizes citizens to be ignorant, irrational, tribalistic, and to not use their votes in very serious ways (Brennan 2016). Thus, a form of epistocracy, in which the votes of people who can prove their political knowledge count more than the votes of people who can’t, is preferred. The United States already excludes over twenty percent of the population from voting. It does not allow legal immigrants to have the vote unless they can pass a civics test that most native-born Americans would likely fail. Many states also exclude convicted felons and many of the mentally ill from the franchise. Americans feel no guilt over systematically excluding children from political power. Most consider it to be common sense. The idea of letting some of them vote if they can prove they are more knowledgeable than the average adult is considered radical and dangerous.

In most situations, Americans readily assume that people should not be allowed to make important decisions for others unless they have at least a reasonable degree of competence to do so. This idea is known as the “Competence Principle” (Brennan 2016). We don’t allow incompetent doctors to make medical decisions, and this is especially true when the medical decisions in question are extremely important, and the “patients” have limited alternatives other than to obey the doctor’s orders. If we refuse to tolerate ignorant medical practice or legal advice, we should take an equally dim view of ignorant voting. Ignorant or illogical decisions by voters can easily lead to ill-advised wars, economic recessions, abusive law enforcement, environmental disasters, and other catastrophes that imperil the lives, freedom, and welfare of large numbers of people.

People love to celebrate ancient Athens as a wonderful example of direct democracy, but they’re really talking about a form of epistocracy. Only a very small number of people were actually voting, and they were the most educated members of society—the people who had

the most political knowledge and the time to spend working on politics (Brennan 2016). Sadly, the vast majority of American voters often lack even basic political knowledge; and what they do know, they analyze in a highly biased way. Instead of acting as truth-seekers, they function as “political fans” cheering on Team Red or Team Blue. The root of the problem is rational ignorance: because there is so little chance that an individual vote will make a difference, voters have little incentive to either acquire relevant knowledge or keep their biases under control (Brennan 2016). Voters’ ignorance and bias leave them easy prey for unscrupulous politicians, ideologues, and interest groups.

Thus the role of elites for Du Bois and Nietzsche is to uplift the masses to new, unimagined heights. It is the idea that with their intellect and ability to demonstrate their contributions to society through action, the masses may be willing to accept certain political limitations or constraints. This does not mean rolling back the Constitution or Bill of Rights to limit individual freedom. It is asking the masses to relinquish a certain amount of political control in the face of democratic idealism. In their ability to relinquish some level of political control and allow elites to flourish and exercise intellectual privilege, they will ultimately benefit more, than by promoting a strong commitment to equality and egalitarianism.

Lastly, what Du Bois and Nietzsche provide the contemporary political climate is the opportunity for society to reassess its classification of who is elite. In some respects, the fear of increased wealth in the hands of a few has created many more “moneymakers” than revolutionaries. Those who society deems “elite” today are usually afforded special privileges, access, exclusivity, and notoriety due to wealth or occupation. What they are asking society, in some ways, is to open the door to many more possibilities for the expression of individual greatness, and by doing so, advancing society as a whole. As we have seen, it is not race, or wealth, country of origin, or history that makes an individual elite. Instead, Du Bois and Nietzsche are suggesting we look at the strength and skill an individual utilizes in order to make a significant contribution to society. If given free rein to pursue their individual passions fully and unapologetically without the constraints of society and limited understanding of the public, then we may truly see the actualization and true potential of democratic government, and thus, the best society has to offer.

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