

Democratic Leadership between Inside and Outside:

Meditations on Herodotus and Thucydides¹

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I want to begin with a famous incident from Thucydides, and a corresponding but somewhat less famous pair of incidents from Herodotus. At the beginning of book 6 of the Peloponnesian War Thucydides tells us:

In the same winter the Athenians resolved to sail against Sicily, and if possible, to conquer it. They were for the most part ignorant of the size of the island and of the numbers of its inhabitants, both Hellenic and native, and they did not realize that they were taking on a war of almost the same magnitude as their war against the Peloponnesians (QUOTE 1, Thucydides 6.1).

In short, the Athenians decided to invade Sicily and make war on Syracuse without knowing any of the things they needed to know about the strengths and weaknesses of their potential allies and potential enemies on the island.

In book 5 of Herodotus's Histories, Aristagoras, the leader of the Ionian revolt against the Persians, comes to mainland Greece to request assistance first from Sparta, and then subsequently from Athens. At Sparta he meets with the dominant figure in the Spartan mixed regime, King Cleomenes, and proposes to him that the Spartans not only cross the Aegean in aid of the Ionians but launch an expedition to the heart of the Persian Empire itself. Aristagoras has even taken the trouble to outfit himself with the early Fifth Century BCE equivalent of a PowerPoint presentation, "a tablet of bronze, on which was engraved a map of the whole Earth, with all the sea and all the rivers" (5.49). Cleomenes asks for two days to mull over Aristagoras's proposal, and then asks a single seemingly incisive question (QUOTE 2, 5.50):

When the appointed day arrived for the answer, and they had come to the place agreed upon, Cleomenes asked Aristagoras how many days' journey it was from the sea of the Ionians to the residence of the king. Now Aristagoras, who in other respects acted cleverly and imposed upon him well, in this point made a mistake: for whereas he ought not to have told him the truth, at least if he desired to bring the Spartans out to Asia, he said in fact that it was a journey up from the sea of three months: and the other cutting short the rest of the account which Aristagoras had begun to give of the way, said: "Guest-friend from Miletos, get thee away from Sparta before the sun has set; for thou speakest a word which sounds not well in the ears of the Lacedemonians, desiring to take them a journey of three months from the sea."

Having failed in Sparta, Aristagoras packs up his laptop and takes his roadshow to the next most influential and powerful city in mainland Greece, Athens (QUOTE 3 Herodotus 5.97):

Aristagoras the Milesian, ordered away from Sparta by Cleomenes the Lacedemonian, arrived at Athens; for this was the city which had most power of all the rest besides Sparta. And Aristagoras came forward before the assembly of the people and said the same things as he had said at Sparta about the wealth which there was in Asia, and about the Persian manner of making war, how they used neither shield nor spear and were easy to overcome. Thus I say he said, and also he added this, namely that the Milesians were colonists from the Athenians, and that it was reasonable that the Athenians should rescue them, since they had such great power; and there was nothing which he did not promise, being very urgent in his request, until at last he persuaded them: for it would seem that it is easier to deceive many than one, seeing that, though he did not prove able to deceive Cleomenes the Lacedemonian by himself, yet he did this to thirty thousand Athenians.

When, and under what circumstances, is it easier to deceive many than one? This talk is about the difficulties democratic peoples face in making informed decisions about external affairs. By external affairs I mean foreign and defense policy.

Today I will draw most of my illustrations from Herodotus and Thucydides. These Athenian examples are helpful because they are embedded within a thin institutional context, the direct Athenian democracy. The thinness of the institutional context makes it easier to understand the function of these institutions in realizing popular power over external affairs. We can then compare our own institutions with Athenian institutions in order to estimate whether and to what extent our institutions realize popular power over external affairs. Only when we have answered the question as to how democratically we conduct our external affairs is it feasible to ask whether we should be conducting them more or less democratically.

One way to think about Twentieth Century political science is as a contest between two conceptions of democracy: democracy as aggregator of preferences, versus democracy as aggregator of knowledge, or "epistemic democracy."² To say that democracy aggregates preferences is to say that, since we all must live together even though we want different and incompatible things, we have to have some way to decide which of those things we will attempt to attain.

Say for example we have agreed to buy ice cream for three children, but we can only afford one tub for all of them .

Table 1: Ice cream preferences

	Most preferred	2 nd preferred	Least preferred
Avner	daiquiri	eggnog	fudge
Betty	eggnog	fudge	daiquiri
Charles	fudge	daiquiri	eggnog

If the children's like and dislikes are as shown in table 1, we can rapidly calculate that if we allow the children to decide by majority rule which kind of ice cream to purchase, and permit new suggestions to be introduced and voted on indefinitely in pairwise competition, we will never make it to the store (Table 2).

Table 2

In pairwise voting

i. $d > e$

ii. $e > f$

iii. $f > d$

d is majority preferred to e

e is majority preferred to f

f is majority preferred to d

	Most	2 nd	Least
A	d	e	f
B	e	f	d
C	f	d	e

Given these preferences there is no way to aggregate them democratically
(Condorcet paradox)

In pairwise voting there is a cycle of majority winners, and it can be shown that no other method of decision-making will produce a decision that is democratic, that aggregates individual preferences so that everybody's preferences count, and count equally in determining the decision.

As in this example, the vision of democracy as preference aggregation is traditionally articulated in order to show that it can't work. Our ice cream is an oft-seen illustration of the Condorcet paradox, generalized by Arrow into an impossibility theorem. What Arrow showed is that there is no reasonable method of social choice that is genuinely collective when we take preferences over social outcomes as fixed and uncorrelated. From the 1960's through the 80's, the Condorcet paradox and Arrow's generalization of it were expounded, in the work of William Riker and his Rochester School of Political Science, as a critique of democracy.

Nowadays, however, with Joshua Cohen, Josiah Ober, Gerry Mackie, and others, the trend is to take Arrow's theorem and related results as critiques of the plausibility of the preference assumptions. In the emerging consensus on an epistemic view of democracy, democratic procedures do not aggregate fixed preferences but alter preferences, generally by altering citizens' views of states

of affairs that give rise to preferences. But today I want to remind you of two related critiques of the view of democratic institutions as preference aggregators that have not been as widely discussed, the objection from $\bar{\epsilon}$ thos and the objection from disinvestment in collective choice.

First, the objection from $\bar{\epsilon}$ thos. Aristotle demonstrates in his Art of Rhetoric that there are three components of character that make a person sufficiently trusted to gain and keep the attention of his audience (Rhetoric 1359b16–60b1): superior practical knowledge of the matter at hand (phronēsis), shared interests, and shared values. In the preference aggregation view, the divergent preferences of citizens are traced back to divergent interests and/or divergent values. If the Arrow picture of our preferences over collective outcomes were correct, we would have no reason to listen to each other, because we would assume that whatever anyone is trying to tell us is either biased or perverted. Later in the course we will consider why there was no serious ex ante public debate within Israel of the expected consequences of the withdrawal from Gaza.

Second, the objection from disinvestment in the collective. Rousseau argues in the "Preface to Narcisse" that if people are not practiced in deceiving, they will discuss only where they have common interests (QUOTE 4): "Among Savages self-interest speaks as insistently as it does among us, but it does not say the same things: love of society and care for the common defense are the only bonds that unite them ... discussions about interests that divide them simply do not arise among them."³ Only insofar as there are gains from cooperation is it desirable to cooperate, and engage in collective deliberation and decision making. If we go back to our ice cream example (Tables 1, 2), it seems that the most straightforward response to this particular distribution of preferences is to buy each child his own ice cream cone. If we have a strong enough preference for eating together, conversely, we will find it easier to agree on which restaurant to go to, even if our preferences over what kind of food to eat are uncorrelated.

For these reasons and others, if we want to understand why people discuss, deliberate, elect, we need to take up the "epistemic conception of democracy." At the basis of the epistemic conception of democracy is the intuition or assertion that the knowledge needful for deciding what is to be done is distributed in society, and generally speaking, unevenly distributed. In the epistemic conception of democracy democratic institutions foster the flow of knowledge from citizens to center of decision, and from center of decision to citizens who will carry out this decision. In models of epistemic democracy the center of decision is conceived as a participatory assembly; which is to say that epistemic models assume that there are no serious empirical or normative problems with representation.

As in Aristotle's picture of deliberation in the politics, each comes to the common meal of the assembly with his or her portion of knowledge, some with choice offerings, some with coarser fare:

The many, of whom each individual is but an ordinary person, when they meet together may very likely be better than the few good, if regarded not individually but collectively, just as a feast to which many contribute is better than a dinner provided out of a single purse. For each individual among the many has a share of virtue and prudence, and when they meet together, they become in a manner one man, who has many feet, and hands, and senses; that is a figure of their mind and disposition. Hence the many are better judges than a single man of music and poetry; for some understand one part, and some another, and among them they understand the whole (QUOTE 5, *Politics* 1281a43-b9).⁴

But unlike real potlucks, everyone gets of share of whatever knowledge or error is contributed to the common banquet of knowledge. Second, epistemic democracy presumes what I will call the Aristotelian presumption, that citizens, confronted with the choice between truth and error, generally will choose truth: "what is true and what is just are naturally stronger than their opposites" (Aristotle,

Rhetoric 1355a24). This claim is repeated by Aristotle in the Rhetoric, as well as by Condorcet in proving the famous Condorcet jury theorem, generalized by List and Goodin (2001) into the claim that a democratic electorate will pick the correct alternative from a plurality of options, if the correct alternative is also the most plausible.

Difficulties for epistemic democracy will arise typically where there is a gap between the true and the plausible, where for some reason people are not merely ignorant, but actually more likely to believe some particular falsehood. In my work on rhetoric I have argued that citizens are guided to the truth primarily by ethical judgment – that is, judgment of *ēthos* -- judgment of the characters of those who are speaking to them, and only secondarily by judgment of what is said. We decide what we should do primarily by deciding who we should trust. So difficulties for epistemic democracy will arise most acutely in cases where the most knowledgeable are, for some, reason, liable to be less trusted.

For the remainder of my talk I will discuss four hard cases for the epistemic conception of democracy, and talk about the way that democratic institutions can be understood as mitigating the difficulties these cases present: secrecy, when discussion invalidates our best possible plan; what I will call the Diodotus effect, where leaders or their rivals make proposals not because they think them best for the city but in order to enjoy the resulting honor, recognition, and influence when their policy is adopted; abstruse technical knowledge, when the public cannot evaluate the relevant details of the various proposed courses of action; and external affairs, where public ignorance is prevalent, and, for reasons I will discuss, apparently infeasible.

First, secrecy: In some cases we can't have an open debate about what is to be done, because if we reveal what we are planning it will be impossible to do what we think ought to be done. Consider the Western Allies in World War II, deciding where to land on the Continent (table 3).

Table 3: secrecy at D-Day

	Germans defend Normandy	Germans defend Pas de Calais
Allies invade Normandy	invasion fails	invasion succeeds
Allies invade Pas de Calais	invasion succeeds	invasion fails

The Allies needed, for their invasion to succeed, to hit the Germans "where they ain't," but, of course, if they discussed their strategic plans openly then the Germans would know where to reinforce.

Technically, this motive for secrecy occurs wherever one of the parties would like to make a move out of equilibrium.⁵

How do we mitigate the challenge of the need for secrecy to a vision of democracy as aggregating knowledge? In book 3 of Herodotus, a conspiracy of seven Persian nobles assassinate the usurper, the False Smerdis, and must then decide how to manage the Persian Empire. This is the occasion for the famous debate over the best regime. One of the arguments of Darius, the advocate of monarchy and eventual monarch, is that the monarch "will be most secretive about plans against ill-minded men" (3.92). The monarch, in Darius's depiction, is a kind of one man standing conspiracy against evildoers. Because the monarch can act without discussion, he can act immediately on information to suppress the evildoers.

Epistemic democracy's answer to the problem of secrecy is magistracy. Democracies delegate power to individually named persons, and judge those empowered, usually retroactively. If secrecy prevents debate, act first, and deliberate afterward.

This might seem at first like a Chelm version of democracy. But democracies do this all the time: That is to say, they

1. Delegate decisions to one person, an accountable magistrate
 2. Review his or her conduct
- and finally
3. Retain, remove, reward, or punish that magistrate, according to that conduct

Consider the simplest possible case of delegation, an anecdote from the aftermath of the Greek victory over the Persians at Salamis told by Plutarch in his Life of Themistocles, but not paralleled in Herodotus (QUOTE 6):

Themistocles, however, formed yet higher designs with a view to naval supremacy. For, after the departure of Xerxes, when the Grecian fleet was arrived at Pagasae, where they wintered, Themistocles, in a public oration to the people of Athens, told them that he had a design to perform something that would tend greatly to their interests and safety, but was of such a nature, that it could not be made generally public. The Athenians ordered him to impart it to Aristides only; and, if he approved of it, to put it in practice. And when Themistocles had discovered to him that his design was to burn the Grecian fleet in the haven of Pagasae, Aristides, coming out to the people, gave this report of the stratagem contrived by Themistocles, that no proposal could be more politic, or more dishonorable; on which the Athenians commanded Themistocles to think no farther of it.

Unable to debate Themistocles' proposal directly, the Athenians charge Aristides "the Just," his principal political rival, with assessing the proposal and reporting back to them. The Athenian Assembly then takes Aristides' own, flat judgment, as the basis for its decision.

Where an individual is empowered to act, without waiting for public debate, he acts in prospect of justifying his acts retrospectively. As Ronald Reagan's National Security Advisor Colin Powell tried to act on the basis of the "clever bastards" test. In assessing a proposed covert operation, Powell, claims, he assumed that it would eventually be on the front page of the Washington Post. When it does, he asked himself, what will the American public say?: "What a bunch of bastards in the White House!" or "What clever bastards we are!" One then advises the President to order only those operations that make the public think of themselves or you as "clever bastards."⁶

One can see such retrospective judgment in action in the account of the last expedition of Miltiades, the Athenian general who brought about the first Greek victory over the Persians, at Marathon (QUOTE 7):

After the defeat at Marathon, Miltiades, who even before was well reputed with the Athenians, came then to be in much higher estimation: and when he asked the Athenians for seventy ships and an army with supplies of money, not declaring to them against what land he was intending to make an expedition, but saying that he would enrich them greatly if they would go with him, for he would lead them to a land of such a kind that they would easily get from it gold in abundance, -- thus saying he asked for the ships; and the Athenians, elated by these words, delivered them over to him (Herodotus 6.132).⁷

Miltiades does not specify a destination for the naval detachment he receives, and neither does the Athenian assembly. Miltiades attacks the island city of Paros, but fails to capture it and his seriously wounded (6.133-6). Returning to Athens in disgrace, he is fined the immense sum of 50 talents, a

sum intended to be so large that it is sufficient to drive him from public life, though shortly after Miltiades dies from his wounds.

It is crucial to keep in mind here that retrospective justification assumes that the only barrier to public understanding is the need for secrecy. If the policy the magistrate chooses should succeed, its success will be manifest or can readily be made manifest to the public to which he is accountable. Miltiades returns with tribute or he fails. The Allies get their invasion force on shore and inland, or they are blocked or thrown back by the Germans. Retrospective judgment is a reasonable control on magistracy only when retrospective judgment is informed judgment.

Since honor and influence come from persuading the people to embark upon the course of action one proposes, one has a motive to speak so as to gain that honor and influence whether or not one believes in the merits of one's own ideas. This is what I call the Diodotus effect, after the speaker Diodotus in the Mytilinean debate who proffers an account of it (QUOTE 8, Thucydides 3.42):

The wise city should not indeed confer fresh honors upon the man whose advice is most often salutary, it certainly should not detract from those which he already has, and as for him whose suggestion does not meet with approval, so far from punishing him, it should not even treat him with disrespect. For then it would be least likely that a successful speaker, with a view to being counted worthy of still greater honors would speak insincerely and for the purpose of winning favor and that the unsuccessful speaker would employ the same means, by courting favor in his turn in an effort to win the multitude to himself.

People like being trusted: from trust comes the rewards of respect, and more important, power.

Speakers in the assembly will say what they think people want to hear, not what these speakers think right. Speakers, Diodotus claims, supply tasty but poisoned food to the banquet of judgment:

speeches that are plausible but false.

Diodotus here assumes what one could call the "Diodotus presumption," that truth is not, generally speaking, more persuasive than error, for otherwise speakers who aimed at plausibility rather than truth would, generally speaking, be disregarded. Diodotus assumes the inverse of the Aristotelian presumption that we have already seen, that truth by nature is stronger than error. Accordingly, Diodotus goes so far as to say that "the man whose proposals are good must lie to the people in order to be believed" (3.43.2). Diodotus claims that it is impossible to do the people good by advising them, without deceiving them.

When I discussed these matters with Robert Howse a while ago, he pointed out to me that Diodotus is asking the audience to ignore the ethos of the speaker and pay attention only to their arguments. To pay attention to arguments and ignore the speakers is only advisable, however, when the rival policies are not premised on rival accounts of the facts, but only the inferences to be drawn from agreed-upon facts.

Yet epistemic democracy is primarily about bringing together distributed knowledge of facts, not about weighing the importance of available facts, or weighing arguments. For that reason when Herodotus claims that the Athenians became more powerful when they became democratic, he emphasizes isagoria, the right of any citizen in Athens to address the assembly, and, presumably, to bring forward something new:

The Athenians accordingly increased in power; and it is evident, not by one instance only but in every way, that isēgorea [equal right to address the assembly] is an excellent thing, since the Athenians while they were ruled by despots were not better in war than any of those who dwelt about them, whereas after they had got rid of despots they became far the first. This proves that when they were kept down they were willfully slack, because they were working for a master, whereas when they had been set free each one was eager to achieve something for himself

(QUOTE 9 Herodotus 5.78).

As an explanation for Athens' rise in power, Herodotus chooses just one of three principal aspects of democracy: the right of each citizen in good standing to address the assembly, and leaves aside isonomia or equality before the law (emphasized by Otañes in advocating the rule of the many at 3.80), and isokratia (equal participation in decision). If we suppose that the facts are known to all, there is no reason to think that all will be superior to one person of truly outstanding judgment in moving from these facts to a decision -- this is Aristotle's argument in the Politics for the rule of the one best man as the best regime (1283b10-1284b34). The superiority of epistemic democracy lies, if anywhere, in its superiority in aggregating information at the center of decision, not in making use of pre-gathered information.⁸

But how does an epistemic democracy make use of information that most citizens cannot understand, that is to say abstruse technical knowledge? How can epistemic democracy make use of any other form of knowledge that is not based on everyday "common-sense" judgment? These seem like cases where people can't judge the dish that expert brings to the potluck of knowledge.

Think about the movement for "evidence-based medicine." The finding is that in certain cases the everyday clinical experience of the practicing physician is misleading about the statistical probability of conditions or of responses to treatment. "Evidence-based medicine" claims that clinicians ought to rely on the publicly available data, the statistical evidence, and not on their own clinical experience.⁹

One might therefore be led, following the Aristotelian argument for the superiority of monarchy, to a scientific or technical argument for scientific or technical autocracy. Why should the technoscience elite have to defer to the opinions of people ignorant of the relevant technical considerations? Why do George W. Bush and his creationist supporters, let us say, get to decide how the US is going to respond to threat of global warming?

One answer is that the realistic alternative to the subordination of technoscience to democratic politics is not the subordination of politics to scientific truth, but the subordination of scientific truth to totalitarian politics, as in the case of Lysenkoism. Lysenko didn't have to persuade competent scientists of his theories -- it was enough for Lysenko to persuade Stalin or Khrushchev. And even the most qualified scientist-king is a Stalin or Khrushchev in every scientific field outside his own particular areas of expertise.

Some modern students of the public face of science have put their hopes for the mitigation of technical or scientific ignorance precisely on what Lysenko tried to suppress, free adversarial scientific debate or what we might call scientific *isēgoria*. Yet as the American experience with dueling scientific experts in forensic situations shows, it is only by chance that lay juries or judges get the science right in their decisions. Free adversarial debate helps the audience to come to a better decision only when they can themselves follow the issues put forward in that debate. In the forensic context what does work better to inform the jury is the peculiar forensic version of mediation by the character of the speaker, namely, cross-examination of the expert witness by the lay advocate. Cross-examination helps the jury to pick not the reliable scientific account but the reliable scientist. Moreover, since as Ian Hacking notes, technoscience is more a matter of producing new effects than providing new explanations, the public trial of science does not come through public debate but through public demonstration. Public demonstration means not only that the new technoscience effect is made manifest to the public, but that its workings are uncovered for scrutiny to the public, in the relevant sense, to other knowledgeable experts who can vent their opinions in a public forum. The fact that these publications may be incomprehensible without special training is less important than that the fact of publication makes them available to all interested parties who have specialized training.

In practice, the effect of public ignorance of technoscience is mitigated in a democracy by credentialing, already noted by Plato in regard to the developed applied sciences of his day, engineering and medicine. Someone who wants to advise the public on a technical matter, says Socrates in the Protagoras, has to show the sovereign people where and with whom he studied that technique (Protagoras 319b-e; cf. Meno 90b ff., Gorgias 455b). The credentialed scientist has been found to be a reliable voice by his colleagues in the scientific community. Credentialing allows us to apply the Aristotelian presumption that truth is generally more plausible than error, and to conclude that people are more likely to trust the genuinely reliable scientist.

Now, finally, we come to the rub of my lecture, knowledge of external affairs. Let us go back to the quote from book VI of Thucydides with which we began (**QUOTE 1**, Thucydides 6.1).

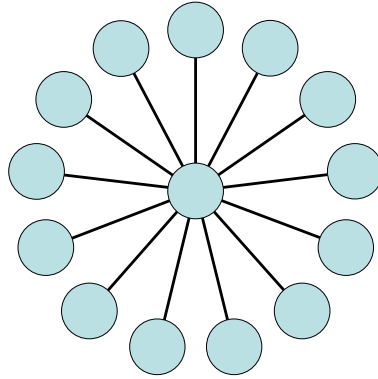
The Athenians know nothing about Sicily. Yet they cannot be informed. Nicias, in his speech to the Assembly during the debate, does not try to give them the facts they need.

I want to suggest some reasons why the ignorance of democratic peoples concerning external affairs might be peculiarly intractable. Let me remind you that we are working within the paradigm of epistemic democracy. As we will discuss in the coming two weeks, according to that paradigm, knowledge is distributed throughout the network, and must be brought to a center of decision.

(TABLE 4):

Table 4: The Network of Epistemic Democracy

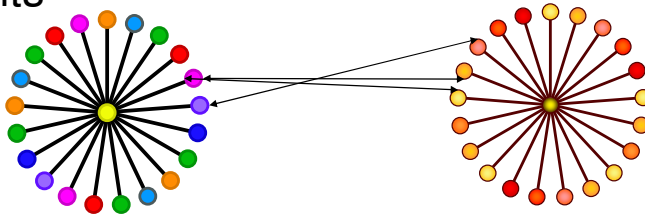
- Information, present throughout the network, is gathered at the center of decision



Yet when we come to the case of external affairs, we are talking about cases where, strictly speaking, not all the relevant information is within the network. Knowledge of external affairs requires contact with those outside the network of the citizen community, with foreigners. Let us see what happens when we put two of these networks together by connecting them at a few points (**TABLE 5**)

TABLE 5

But when we put two of these networks together by connecting them at few points



From Table 5, we can see that those few people who have these contacts have interests that distinguish them from their fellow citizens, because of their very position as connectors between the networks.

Think about the "double agent": the CIA spends about as much effort on keeping its people from having inappropriate contacts with foreigners as it does making sure they have appropriate contacts with foreigners. Those who maintain contact with outsiders may also come to diverge in their values from insider or "provincial" citizens one's own society may also have values that are different, insofar as the contact citizens are influenced by the distinctive values of those with whom they come into contact.

Let's have a little refresher on mitigating problems of epistemic democracy: There is the problem of secrecy, which is mitigated by delegation and retrospective deliberation. There is the problem of abstruse technical knowledge, which is mitigated by credentials, including the technical record of speaker, enabling the citizen body to judge the scientist, say, and not the science.

But none of these apply readily in external affairs!

Contact with the outside poses ethical difficulties. By this I mean not that it makes the contacting insider a bad person, but it makes it more difficult for that insider on the edge to develop the kind of character that persuades, for maintaining a trustworthy character or persuasive *ēthos*. Precisely the extensive contacts that give one knowledge of foreigners give one interests and values distinct from those of one's fellow citizens.

First of all, agents of contact value process, while their principals value substance. Second, agents of contact can be suborned (bribery), and third, agents of contact can be "corrupted" by foreign values.

First, "process." Contact with the outside creates a version of the Diodotus problem. Citizens who engage in these contacts, whose importance comes from these contacts, have a distinctive interest in maintaining these contacts. In a slogan: diplomats value process, and compromise the substantive results in order to "maintain the process." The bottom line of George Kennan's evaluation of American intervention against the Bolsheviks is that the intervention was a bad idea because it led to the disruption of diplomatic contacts between the American and the Soviets.¹⁰ Of course, maintaining the process is also of value to the diplomat's principal, the people or their elected leadership, but the trouble is that it is hard for the principal to weigh the value of substance against process, not least because the only expert advice he can get is from experts who are themselves implicated in the processes the principal is trying to evaluate .

The modes of mitigating public ignorance that apply to secrets and technical knowledge are much less applicable to knowledge of external affairs. Credentialing, as we have seen, testifies to the extent of one's knowledge of things beyond the common sense of one's fellows. Credentialing is therefore not very helpful in mitigating public ignorance of external affairs, because the credentials that testify to one's knowledge of foreign matters testify at the same time to one's commitment to diplomatic process, the ease with which one may be seduced, bribed, or intimidated by outsiders, or

influenced by their peculiar foreign values. Credentials in external affairs therefore make one not more trustworthy as a source of knowledge about external matters, as in the case of the credentialed public physician, but less so.

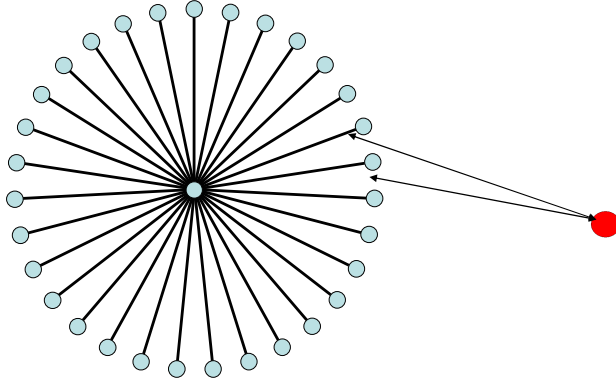
Retrospective judgment, which mitigates the necessary public ignorance of secrets, also does less to mitigate public ignorance of external affairs. Retrospective judgment assumes, of course, that the general public knows more after the decision than it knew before. This does not appear to be generally true when we look at external affairs, because public knowledge of the foreign consequences of their own societies' actions is limited, and public knowledge of the constraints presented by the policy of foreign countries is even more limited. Consider the Israeli public assessments of Levi Eshkol's diplomacy prior to the Six Day War, today, forty years after the war. Eshkol is still understood as hesitating, when he was in fact maneuvering diplomatically vis-à-vis the US and the USSR in order to reduce the costs of a massive Israeli preemptive strike.¹¹

Democratic peoples are therefore prone to a lamppost effect, treating as the whole story the internal information which their polities excel at aggregating. Democratic peoples therefore assess their leaders based on the domestic consequences of their actions, considering only costs, generally speaking, and not benefits.

Democracies are not merely ignorant, they are comparatively ignorant, disadvantaged in their knowledge of external affairs when compared to their non-democratic rivals (see Table 6).

Table 6

In non-democracies the problem is less severe



The dictator does not have to persuade a bunch of people who have no contact with the foreign democracy!

We may think of North Korean autocrat Kim Jong Il as isolated from the West, but he has more contact with Western governments than the populations that elect and dismiss these governments have with Kim Jong Il! Autocratic governments are therefore frequently more nimble in international affairs than their democratic rival, because they do not have to temper their diplomacy to what their public knows about foreigners, any more than they have to temper their domestic policy to public opinion about anything else.

What, then, mitigates the relative ignorance of democracy in external affairs? To put it bluntly, how do democracies survive this ignorance? So far the best answer I have been able to come up with is that democracies may make so much better use of information that is available inside their networks that they become much powerful than their autocratic rivals. It makes little difference how badly they do externally, given how much better they do internally.

Consider America diplomacy vis à vis the USSR from 1939-1991. The Soviets won every diplomatic battle, speaking modo grosso, and still managed to lose the Cold War. At the end of the 1980's Gorbachev surrendered to American technological supremacy without a fight, incapable of

matching the Americans in conventional smart weapons, and fearful of Reagan's plan to research and deploy an effective ABM system ("Star Wars").

Like all quantitative explanations, this one is not always valid, for sufficiently large mistakes in external policy can outweigh the power advantage of democracies. One might contemplate the shock and awe of Athens' defeat in the Sicilian expedition. But consider also the 1940 Battle of France: as we shall see when read recent work by Ariel Roth, both the British and French relied on a view of German warmaking capacities and intentions that turned out to be wildly wrong.

Democracies, then, can not always rely on their domestic superiority in the face of diplomatically more skillful autocracies. This makes even more pressing the quest for some institutional fix that mitigates public ignorance of external affairs, in the way that magistracy mitigates the effects of the need for secrecy, and credentialing and academic freedom mitigate the effects of technoscience ignorance.

Are there institutions that can mitigate the effects on foreign policy of public ignorance of external affairs?

We had better get to work and find some.

NOTES

1. Versions of this paper were delivered to the Jerusalem Seminar in the History of Political Thought in June 2007, and to a seminar in the Department of Government and Politics at the University of Maryland in April 2008. I would like to thank Steve Elkin, Efraim Podoksik, Mario Shnaider, Alex Orwin, and the other seminar participants for their comments. Anna Kochin edited an earlier version, and Gil Friedman gave me some pointers to the literature.
2. Those of us who were privileged to hear Yaron Ezrahi's talk at the Rationality Conference in Jerusalem in the Spring of 2007 were reminded that the term "epistemē" and the distinction between epistemē and doxa were invented by Plato in order to charge the people, the demos, with ignorance of the thing most needful, epistemē. Doxa is derived from dokei, "it seems," with which the ruling Athenian people prefaced their decrees, so we should be as suspicious of "the epistemic conception of democracy" as we might be of the "legitimist conception of democracy." Since the phrase "epistemic democracy" is well rooted in the literature it is probably too late to get rid of it.
3. Rousseau, "Preface to Narcisse" tr. Gourevitch in The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 101n, Pliadé edition 2:969-70n.
4. For a discussion of this passage, see Jeremy Waldron, The Dignity of Legislation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), chapter 5, "Aristotle's Multitude."
5. The "D-Day" game depicted is known in the literature as "Matching Pennies." It has no pure strategy Nash equilibrium, and a mixed strategy equilibrium where each side chooses an invasion area to attack (Allies) or reinforce (Germans) using the flip of a fair coin; James D. Morrow, Game Theory for Political Scientists (Princeton: Princeton: University Press, 1994), 61-2, 81-88.
6. Colin Powell, My American Journey, pp. ?.
7. Though Hammond in the Cambridge Ancient History² 4:519 does not find it plausible that Miltiades could have been granted that degree of blank check.
8. There is something misleading about Aristotle's example of the superiority of the many to the one in judging a completed work of music or a completed poem, unless we keep in mind that judgment of music and poetry is judgment in the light of one's previous experiences of music and poetry.
9. See Paul Meehl, "Why I Do Not Attend Case Conferences," in Psychodiagnosis: Selected Papers (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1973).
10. George F. Kennan, Soviet-American Relations 1917-1920, vol. 2, The Decision to Intervene (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), 470-2.
11. See Michael Oren, Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).