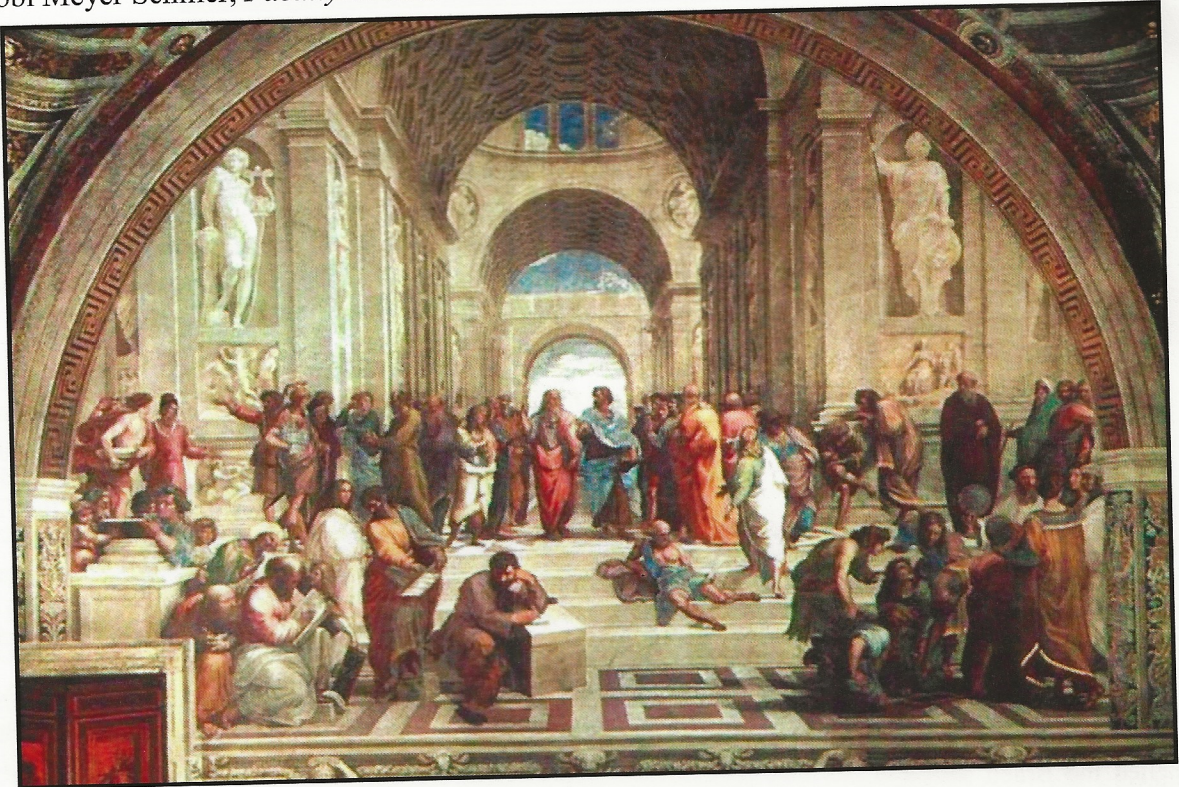


Will the Polis Leave the Cave?

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The polis, the ancient city - state of Greece or, alternatively, its citizenry, is the alluring title of this journal. It conjures up the nexus of rulers and ruled which is the departure point for all political musings. A Greek word, it also symbolizes the entire philosophic enterprise which that mountainous region on the Aegean Sea has bequeathed mankind. Accordingly, The Polis seems a most appropriate title for an effort which purports to bring detached, reflective scrutiny to man's social endeavors.

History and the Political Endeavor

"The order of history is the history of order." Thus wrote Eric Voegelin (1901 - 1985), arguably one of the greatest political thinkers of the twentieth century. In

other words, to study history is simply to trace man's attempt to establish good order, for that is what men in groups have attempted to do from their earliest days. This goal of creating order which is just, moral, pious, and successful is the very essence of politics. It is not limited to nations as we know them (a relatively recent development) or to tribes, manors, villages and the like, but extends even to families, schools, armies, teams, and friends. All these are the stuff of history and its soul, political speculation, for all are constantly in the flux of adjudicating group and individual claims and visions, desires and ultimate norms.

It is to the task of political contemplation that all are summoned by virtue of simply being human. Just as the mere act of

living demands that we decide how to live, so too does the given of living with others require that we create standards of interpersonal behavior.

Modernist Myths

It is this contemplation of men in groups that is the starting point of political thought. This was once referred to in European Civilization as political philosophy, that is, the love of the wisdom of politics. Of course, over the last two centuries in the mechanistic assault on Classical thought, (be it rational or revealed thought) there has been a trend to label this field "political science." This served the desire of certain materialist Enlightenment ideologies to view political matters as if their understanding is similar to that of the physical sciences.

Of course, the particular combination or revelation, experience, tradition, ethics/morality, art, myth, and language which are the raw stuff of social reflection, goes far beyond the laboratory reductionism of our latter day CSIs. Indeed, even Horatio and Macgrasp that their gadgets are simply the physical structure of social order. It is the supra - rational devotion of Caine and Taylor to their dangerous task, their "team" and justice itself which is the metaphysical substructure of their heroic escapades. Hence, they too are political creatures -- not simply talented "scientists." And, despite the multi - faceted complexity of political philosophy, its study is unavoidable in governing our lives and that of the polis.

Alas, it is the refusal of contemporary American political discourse to escape its obsession with transient questions which renders it incapable of the wonder, originality and reverence needed to return to the true political enterprise and subsequently to effect true social change. It is this inability to return to first principles which allows America (and much of European thought is straight jacketed by our severely constrained model) to be placed under the soft totalitarianism of a monochromatic complex of media, education, and "government." This unstated power structure allows for neither dissent nor discussion of its underlying dogmas. By this process of mind control and simplification of debate all critical thought on our unstated axioms is forbidden. We are allowed noisy but ultimately meaningless squabbles on matters of minor details rather than larger issues.

Essential Political Questions

For simplicity sake, let us posit a few core questions that all po-

litical theorists must attend to. They might be categorized as a) the form of government and the source of its authority (will of the people or some higher standard?). This is best illustrated by thinking of situations where the majority wills that which is morally atavistic (Nazi Germany for example); would it behoove the virtuous citizenry to thwart the popular will? And, if yes, does this not point in the direction of some source of governmental legitimacy that goes beyond the will of the governed? Alternatively, is there any such thing as the free will of the governed? Surely all societies (particularly those with government run education) teach certain truths and these truths are those which fill the minds of all citizens, thus refuting the entire posited mythos of democracy? b) What is the just allocation of resources, which goes to the libertarian versus welfarist divide, but extends to the feudal community, distributism and all of the thousands of economic schools in between? c) What is the ultimate source of values and beliefs upon which of the realms' very existence is predicated? d) Who is to be a member of the realm, which seeks to answer who is in and who is out and on what basis?

These are questions which, sans serious investigation, lead to a lack of focus or even simple coherence in public debate. At present, both political parties in America, despite all their loudly stated, supposed, external and internal differences, are united in the fundamental axioms of massive welfare and warfare statism, give or take a few billions here and there. They are also all pledged to the dogmas of egalitarianism (of opportunity, result, and reality itself) and ever increasing secularization of the realm. They differ

on the speed of the processes but their essential commitment to them is never questioned. One may find outside the playground of "legitimate" debate some timid reflection on these givens; think for example of a Ron Paul or a Ralph Nader, but the price of even their respectful dissent is their soft, but absolute ostracization by the true sources of power in society.

The Polis to Aid the Polis?

It is hoped that *The Polis* will attempt to step beyond these stifling boundaries. This may occur first by subjecting the perimeter fencing that imprisons our public forums to a bit of splicing. On a deeper level, though, this journal will contribute to deeper analyses to the degree that is willing to think long and hard about fundamental socio - political assumptions. This process, which will call on reason, reality, revelation and moral - mythical insight, may yield a significant harvest for *The Polis* contributors and readers. It may as well add to the hope (probably futile at this late date) that the real polis, which we actually inhabit, may yet be renewed before all that we cherish is swept away. But should that last ditch effort be too late, then, at very least, reflecting on the Eternal Things may steel us and our descendants for the night which rapidly descends upon the West.

Rabbi Mayer Schiller is the Mashgiach of and Maggid Shiur in our yeshiva. Before many of our current students were born, he coached the hockey team to six consecutive championships, which included a startling three and a half seasons without a loss.