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ARCHITECTS AND ENGINEERS:

TWO TYPES OF TECHNOCRAT AND THEIR RELATION TO DEMOCRACY

ABSTRACT:

Technocracy typically means the exercise of power by means of, or justified by, special knowledge. Friedman expands the concept of technocracy to mean a view of politics as primarily a matter of problem-solving. In the first part of this essay I consider the benefits and costs of stretching the concept such that people with neither specialised knowledge nor political power can be considered “technocrats.” In the second part of the essay I draw a distinction between “engineering” and “architectural” models of technocracy, and I suggest that Friedman underplays the extent to which “exitocracy” (ch. 7)—as a form of architectural technocracy—raises a parallel set of questions about the role of experts in designing “exitocratic” systems.

Keywords: democratic technocracy, epistocracy, exitocracy, naïve technocratic realism, public ignorance, radical ignorance

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In recent years there has been a lively debate—much of it carried on in the pages of this journal—about the state of public ignorance and its implications for democratic politics. Some treat public ignorance as a grounds for promoting the role of experts in politics (Blinder 1997), or narrowing the scope of democratic decision in favor of markets (Somin 2008). Others have questioned the evidence for the claims of ignorance, and defended the qualities of collective public judgment (Chambers 2018). In *Power Without Knowledge: A Critique of Technocracy* (Oxford University Press, 2019), Jeffrey Friedman takes a radically different approach to this debate, focusing on the way in which experts, too, lack the knowledge they would need to effectively solve public

problems. In a bracing critique, he gives supposedly expert political scientists and economists in particular the kind of critical treatment they usually dish out to “ordinary” citizens, challenging their knowledge of public opinion and of economic behavior. In the latter case, he mounts a frontal assault on the accuracy of predicting behavior on the basis of incentives alone, which ignores the heterogeneity of economic actors’ webs of belief about how to respond to a given incentive, as well as heterogeneity between economists’ own ideas about how to respond to an incentive and the ideas of the agents in question. Moreover, he argues, economist theorists, like more positivistic social scientists who attempt to predict people’s behavior on the basis of quantitative data, are typically not even aware that they need—and lack—knowledge of agents’ webs of belief. They consequently misunderstand the character of their predictions and cultivate a pathological degree of overconfidence in them (193).

Friedman says in the preface that *Power Without Knowledge* is “untimely.” This hardly seems the moment, he suggests, to claim that our politics is *too* technocratic. But if we take (for instance) the failures of economic governance leading to the 2008 financial crisis to bear some causal responsibility for the rise of populists such as Donald Trump, then Friedman’s argument is extremely timely. Significant aspects of our politics have been underpinned by the assumption that it is possible to predict human behavior sufficiently well to craft effective solutions to policy problems. This assumption is underpinned by widespread intellectual trends emphasizing, on the positivist side, the adequacy of behavioral “data” for making behavioral predictions, and, on the neoclassical theory side, the rationality of optimizing agents—which, according to Friedman, means, among other things, their “effective omniscience” about how to respond to their incentives—and thus the efficiency of markets (Chapter 4). These assumptions, as Friedman notes, are very much present in the more sophisticated accounts provided by behavioral economists, who recognize limits to agents’ ability to optimize their preferences, but treat those limits as themselves being predictable and thus capable of being tamed and controlled (196-200). By stressing the fundamental unpredictability of human behavior, Friedman’s argument recalls early twentieth century economic thought, in which the assumption of radical uncertainty was a red thread linking the work of Knight, Keynes, and Hayek. And his book suggests that we take much more seriously the limitations that human unpredictability sets on what we can demand and expect from democratic politics.

His critique is both deep and broad, suggesting that as democratic subjects, we have been habituated into technocratic styles of thinking about politics that are pathological because they transgress those epistemic limitations (Chapter 6). This critique encompasses much of the practice

of modern democratic politics, insofar as it is framed around finding policy solutions to social and economic problems. Not only does this Progressive Era view of politics place an “immense epistemic burden on the people,” it also—in an almost Foucauldian echo—shapes the democratic citizen in the image of the policy-making problem solver. This is the kind of subjecthood demanded and cultivated by the practices of modern democracy. We are positioned as problem-solvers when surveys and polls from political scientists and parties alike ask us about policy issues, and this way of framing democratic subjects is reinforced in the press, as in a recent *New York Times* “explainer” titled: “How the Democratic Candidates Would Tackle the Housing Crisis” (Astor 2020)—a type of headline that, I hope, is so familiar that it suggests the ubiquity of the phenomenon Friedman addresses.

It is this deeper story that I want to discuss in this comment. In particular, I want to focus on the way Friedman conceptualizes “technocracy” and criticizes it, with a view to highlighting the way in which on the one hand he expands the scope of technocracy far beyond its usual association with rule by experts, yet on the other hand frames it in such a way that it downplays what I call “architectural” models of technocracy. I will suggest that he thereby misses the extent to which “exitocracy” (ch. 7)—as a form of architectural technocracy—raises a parallel set of questions about the role of experts in designing exitocratic systems, and the crucial question of the relation of exitocracy to democratic politics.

Technocracy Without Knowledge

Technocracy is often associated with the idea of expert rule. The term was coined in 1919 by an American inventor, William H. Smyth, and meant rule by scientists and engineers (echoing Thorstein Veblen’s essays of the same year, later published as *Engineers and the Price System* [Veblen 1921]). The early advocates of technocracy thought that the political and economic order was no longer suited to the current stage of industrial and technological development, and that resources could be more efficiently managed by engineers than businessmen or politicians. At least part of the impetus for the movement came from the successful experience of national economic planning boards during World War I. After the onset of the Great Depression, the “technocrat” movement enjoyed a brief moment of public interest before disappearing more or less without trace (Akin 1977). By that point, however, the term itself, as opposed to the movement, had gone beyond the very specific ideas of the movement’s leaders (such as using energy surveys to replace the price system), coming to be associated with the more general idea of scientists, engineers and technical experts of various kinds exercising political power (in the sense of who gets what, when and how)

in virtue of their specialist knowledge. Although the term remains pretty nebulous—in recent years, it has been used variously to refer not only to rule by experts (Caramani 2017; Fischer 1990), bureaucrats (Bickerton and Invernizzi Acetti 2015), or elites in general (Offe 2013), but also to norms of impartiality (Bickerton and Invernizzi Acetti 2015; Urbinati 2014), and even to the conviction that there must be an “evidence base” for public policy (Easterly 2016)—it has tended to retain something of the following structure: the exercise of power by means of, or justified by, special knowledge (Putnam 1977, 384).

Friedman, by contrast, describes technocracy as a vision that reduces politics to a set of problems to be solved by legislative and regulatory interventions. The defining mark of the technocrat is the belief that politics consists in addressing social and economic problems—such as how to reduce poverty or control the spread of infectious disease—and that there are better or worse solutions to those problems. For Friedman, then, technocracy is not identical with rule by experts. You can be a technocrat, in the sense of thinking of politics as primarily a matter of problem-solving, without actually possessing any specialist knowledge or exercising any decision-making power in virtue of it. Friedman is not denying that there is an important class of people who *do* claim expertise with respect to some of these problems, whom he calls “epistocrats.” The more common manifestation of the technocratic view of politics, however, is the “citizen technocrat,” who forms her own account of the causes and cures for social problems and then seeks to promote her favored solutions through available political channels. Between them, the “epistocrats” and “citizen-technocrats” encompass most of what contemporary politics and government do: politicians, Friedman says, often present themselves as having solutions to social and economic problems; voters select candidates on the basis of their resolve to push through favored solutions; and administrators draw on specialist knowledge, predominantly from the discipline of economics, to implement or perhaps constrain the choices made by voters and elected leaders.

One trait that tends to be shared by citizen-technocrats and epistocrats alike is “radical ignorance”: ignorance of what they don’t know, which, in a technocratic context, means the difficult-to-discern beliefs of those whose behavior technocracy attempts to control. The problem of radical ignorance is, for Friedman, intimately connected to the view of politics as problem solving, for it is the framing of politics as a process of finding solutions to social problems that generates demands for a possibly unfeasible degree of knowledge. The would-be technocrat, he suggests, needs to know (1) which social problems are real and significant (in terms of how broadly and intensely they affect people), (2) what causes those problems, (3) which actions can “solve, mitigate, or prevent” them, and (4) what those solutions would cost, including unintended and thus

unanticipated costs (46). It is clear enough that when defined in those terms, the acquisition of technocratic knowledge is a daunting task, not only for ordinary citizen technocrats but also for expert epistocrats. The epistemic problem grows worse once we recognize that the last three requirements, in particular, entail retrodictive and predictive knowledge of the springs of human behavior. Any legislative or regulatory solution to a problem, Friedman points out, can be effective only by controlling people's behavior in order to get them to take desirable actions. Thus, the central epistemic need of technocracy is reliable knowledge of how to predict people's behavior after a policy initiative is implemented (covering the third and fourth types of technocratic knowledge), which also requires an understanding of *why* they acted, in the past, in a manner that leads us to predict certain behavior in the future (the second type). This epistemic need for retrospective and prospective behavioral knowledge, however, appears to be much more easily met if one is unaware of the fact that those whose behavior is being retrodicted and predicted may have beliefs that would incline them to react idiosyncratically (in the opinion of the epistocrat or citizen-technocrat) to a technocratic initiative. Technocrats' radical ignorance of these idiosyncratic beliefs, then, transforms them from what Friedman calls "judicious" technocrats, who would be "ideationally sensitive," into epistemically arrogant political actors who are blind to the limits of their knowledge, unaware of "their need for, and . . . their lack of, the four types of technocratic knowledge" (301).

Focusing on epistocrats, who are experts by definition, their knowledge of this or that aspect of human behavior and public policy, perhaps in great depth and detail, is nonetheless consistent with radical ignorance of what they would really need to know in order to solve social problems, and how far short their knowledge falls below this bar. Friedman shows us how an economics Ph.D. and a lifetime of experience in public policy is entirely consistent with, and indeed can even select for,¹ radical ignorance. When economists make predictions based on the effects of incentives, to mention one of his key arguments, they are radically ignorant of the radical ignorance of ordinary people, who do not know all that they would need to know in order to act in the way the theory supposes, introducing a major blind spot into economic knowledge (193).

It is worth pausing to consider how far this conception of technocracy — as a problem-solving mentality plus radical ignorance — takes us from the common usage of the term. Friedman's technocrats include ordinary citizens with no power and no special knowledge: they, too, seem, at least according to research about U.S. public opinion (in Friedman's interpretation of

¹ Real-world epistocracy, he suggests, generates a pressure to predict, which selects for positivism or naive realism; and a pressure to overstate one's confidence, which leads to what he calls the "spiral of conviction."

it), to be radically ignorant of what they would need to know if their policy preferences and political choices were to be reliably accurate. On his account, then, technocratic politics is not the dry and bloodless “policy without politics” (Schmidt 2006) with which it is often associated. Rather, what you get when politics is conceived as problem solving, and people fail to see that their own solutions are partial renderings of a complex reality, is not a calm, technical politics, but an especially bloody, bitter, and Manichean politics. Because problems are assumed to have simple and obvious solutions, the key question is identifying those with the will to carry them out, and opposing the “bad guys” who want to get in the way. Thus, “technocratic politics takes on the appearance of a moral battle over ends, not a debate over difficult-to-parse means” (301). What he calls “technocratic naivete” or “naive technocratic realism” leads to a politics in which people do not advance their solutions to problems in the spirit of provisionality and fallibility, but as statements of the obvious. We then ascribe the fact of disagreement not to irreducible differences in judgment in a context of moral and social complexity, but to the ill will of our opponents. The naive realist fails to see that our simple solutions are simply “fallible interpretations of ambiguous realities”—and, further, that “what seems to be a self-disclosing reality is actually a generalization from a partial vision of reality” (37). This politics was described by Lippmann (one of the heroes of this book) thus:

The opponent presents himself as the man who says, evil be thou my good. He is an annoyance who does not fit into the scheme of things. Nevertheless he interferes. And since that scheme is based in our minds on incontrovertible fact fortified by irresistible logic, some place has to be found for him in the scheme. Rarely in politics or industrial disputes is a place made for him by the simple admission that he has looked upon the same reality and seen another aspect of it. That would shake the whole scheme. Thus . . . out of the opposition we make villains and conspiracies. (Lippmann [1922] 1997, 82–83).

Again—and this is one of the great strengths of the book—this critique is not directed only at the ordinary citizen. Friedman contends that many political scientists and economists who have commented on “public ignorance” are themselves naive realists with respect to their own claims to knowledge. Thus, someone like Bryan Caplan, whose *Myth of the Rational Voter: Why Democracies Choose Bad Policies* (2008) benchmarks political ignorance against the knowledge claimed by economists, does not recognize that economists are making knowledge *claims* rather

than simply “knowing.” Moreover, Caplan attributes this very “knowledge”—that is, the knowledge claims of economists—to voters, such that when they act as if they disagree with economists, it really means that they are irrationally but deliberately *choosing* to behave ignorantly or “ideologically” while knowing that this is what they are doing (61-64). Friedman finds such epistemological naivete too in the very different figure of Theodor Adorno, who, in his interpretation of the interviews on which he based the “authoritarian personality” thesis, consistently attributes to anti-Semites the knowledge that Jews do not possess the terrible traits attributed to them (210-219). Like Caplan, Adorno treats his own knowledge as so self-evident that those he is interpreting cannot possibly be ignorant of it. At the most general level, Friedman is targeting any unreflexive claim to knowledge of social reality, one that is unaware of its nature as a partial and fallible interpretation with which others may (rightly or wrongly) disagree.

This analysis leads Friedman to a provocative claim: that populism and technocracy are not opposites, but are two sides of the same coin. The apogee of the technocratic mentality, on his account, is not a figure like Mario Monti, the Italian economist appointed to the Italian Senate and then made Prime Minister without ever having been elected, but rather Donald Trump, who Friedman describes as the “technocrat-in-chief” (291). Trump is, of course, deeply opposed to professional bureaucrats, scientists, and policy experts. But he nonetheless presents himself as a problem-solver, grounding his claim to know better than the experts in his experience as a businessman (in this he is, of course, tapping a long tradition in American politics). Furthermore, he presents his solutions as simple and obvious, and focuses on the need for resolute execution in the face of opposition, both the overt opposition of protestors and the secret opposition of the “deep state.”

While the idea of Trump as a technocrat is provocative, I don’t find it entirely persuasive. Or rather, I think Friedman’s account flattens out the complexities in the relations between populist and (what is usually called) technocratic political styles. One thing that populists and technocrats seem to share is a commitment to uncontested executive power. Both promise to get things done at a time when we seem unable to forge agreement on political action through public debate and parliamentary procedure. Yet, as recent commentators have suggested, populism and technocracy are best thought of not as two manifestations of the same tendency, nor as simple opposites, but as “complements” (Bickerton and Invernizzi-Accetti 2015). They interact and feed off one another in a mutually reinforcing dynamic, where each responds to the perceived excesses of the other, and thereby confirms the other’s worst fears (Urbinati 2014). What they have in common is a hostility to democratic pluralism and to the dispersal of power implied by party competition (Caramani 2017),

but they remain distinct, and their relationship to one another is a more complex dynamic which narrows the space for democratic pluralism. This sort of dynamic disappears in Friedman's view, which rather suggests that the space of pluralist politics itself has been thoroughly colonized by the technocratic mentality. On his view, parties compete to offer solutions to social problems, epistocrats claim to be able to solve social problems without input from voters, and populists claim to know how to solve social problems if only they could win the acclaim of the majority and execute their program without obstruction or compromise. Yet this may be stretching the concept too far. If technocracy is everywhere, then the critique of technocracy becomes an undifferentiated critique of more or less the whole of modern democratic politics.

Architects and Engineers

Although Friedman's critique of technocracy has an unusually wide scope, it is at the same time restricted to what we might call an "engineering" conception of technocracy. Friedman, as we saw above, rejects the identification of technocracy with rule by experts, and would not sign on to the even more specific idea of rule by engineers invoked by the early twentieth-century "technocrat" movement. However, I think it's fair to describe his target in terms of the "assimilation of politics to engineering" invoked by Michael Oakeshott (1962, 4) in his account of rationalism in politics. "The conduct of affairs, for the Rationalist, is a matter of solving problems. . . . In this activity the character which the Rationalist claims for himself is the character of the engineer, whose mind (it is supposed) is controlled throughout by the appropriate technique and whose first step is to dismiss from his attention everything not directly related to his specific intentions. This assimilation of politics to engineering is, indeed, what may be called the myth of rationalist politics."² The engineering model of technocracy views politics as a set of problems to be solved, advocates continuous interventions in complex social and economic systems, and presupposes the possibility of a degree of prediction and control centered on administrative power and underpinned by social science. It treats social problems, such as reducing poverty, say, or providing abundant low-cost housing, as technically difficult but conceptually straightforward. The engineering model is characterized by what Friedman calls the "simple-society ontology," which treats society as, in principle, not only knowable (which Friedman would, I think, accept), but also transparent (that is, *easily* knowable).

² While Oakeshott is associated with political conservatism, a similar critique of technocracy as a sort of rationalism is well rooted on the left, and in particular among participatory democrats (see Fischer 1990).

Modern society, of course, is not simple. It is “epistemically complex” (27). The epistemic complexity of society, brought about (at least in part) by the “ideational heterogeneity” of its human constituents, undermines assumptions of uniformity in human behavior, and makes prediction and control difficult at best. Indeed, absent “homogenizing counterforces” (169), the prediction of people’s behavior would require a “complete history of [their] relevant ideational exposures” and of the interaction of those exposures in their webs of belief, a task “more difficult than mind reading” (144) (although that probably won’t stop Google trying). Friedman holds that epistemic complexity sets a limit on the sorts of things we can credibly attempt to do to each other with any hope of success. However, since there *may* be homogenizing counterforces in any given case, such as shared norms across individuals’ webs of belief, we cannot say in advance where these limits are or how insurmountable they might be.

Thus, Part I of *Power Without Knowledge*, through an exploration of the Lippmann-Dewey debate of the 1920s (Chapter 2) and an elaboration of the epistemology implicit in Lippmann’s position (Chapter 3), makes a presumptive case in favor of unpredictable ideational heterogeneity, which would lead to some degree of technocratic failure (171, 317-19). Epistemic complexity can, however, be recognized and acknowledged, and we can try to work within its limits. It is in this spirit that Part II explores the practices and ideas of contemporary epistocrats and citizen-technocrats, where Friedman criticizes the “injudicious” neglect, by both groups, of the ideational character of the human beings whose behavior they are trying to predict and control. A judicious or “ideationally sensitive” technocrat would try to determine “where the areas of predictability are located, how wide they are against a backdrop of presumptively unpredictable ideas, and the behavior they are likely to cause” (169), but neither citizen-technocrats nor epistocrats tend to do this at present. Instead, they implicitly treat people as non-ideational and thus fully transparent and predictable. Part III introduces “exitocracy” as a conceptual “alternative to really existing technocracy” (318), with the aim of establishing a *comparative* “hierarchy of technocratic legitimacy,” according to which judicious technocracy can be expected to do better (to some unknown extent) than injudicious technocracy, but exitocracy can be expected to do better than either (341).

An exitocracy is a state whose “cardinal goal would be to provide a framework within which individuals could attempt to solve—or, better, escape—the problems that afflict them as individuals.” Exitocracy would “forego, wherever possible, the frontal analytic assault on social problems, society-wide, that typifies “ordinary” technocracy, whether judicious or injudicious” (322). Instead it would rely on competition between a range of private providers and

employers, and citizens empowered to exit from any one of them in search of better solutions. Friedman takes the exit mechanism to have “inherent beneficial epistemic properties” (318), rooted in the situated judgment of customers and workers. Those running the firms and businesses are no better placed, epistemically, to predict behavior and craft solutions to problems than are ordinary technocrats: both businesspeople and technocrats are trying to predict human behavior. But if (i) there are several competing providers; (ii) they are diverse (thanks to ideational heterogeneity) and thus produce a variety of solutions; and (iii) they are in competition with one another for customers, more effective solutions are likely to emerge. The citizens choosing between these providers are the same people who are called upon to make technocratic judgments in a democratic technocracy, but when they use the exit mechanism they are not called on to predict the behavior and thus the ideas of millions of “anonymous others,” as they are in their capacity as citizen-technocrats (331). Rather, they are called on to make situated judgments about how to handle immediate and personal problems. Friedman thus opens the chapter with an approving citation of Schumpeter’s distinction between a citizen’s knowledge of distant affairs mediated through the testimony and interpretation of others and the direct knowledge of “things which are familiar to him independently of what his newspaper tells him” (cited at 321). Our attempts to judge matters close to our experience, while still fallible, are at least epistemically superior to our attempts to make sense of and articulate society-wide claims about the causes and cures of social problems or—I might add—about the system of rules under which we live.

Although Friedman describes exitocracy as a (conceptual) alternative to technocracy (318) and speaks of the “choice between exitocracy and technocracy” (347), he also describes exitocracy as itself “an unusual or “extraordinary” version of technocracy” (322). By this he principally means that exitocracy would inevitably be nested within technocracy. That is to say, no state can rely wholly on exit-based empowerments for the simple reason that the state has to “provide a framework” within which competition among providers can be fostered and choice by consumers enabled (*ibid.*). An exitocracy needs to supply the “primary” public goods of “redistribution and a legal system” to ensure that people have the capacity to make use of exit (341); then there are “secondary” public goods, that is, ‘nonprimary public goods that are justified on exitocratic grounds by virtue of exitocrats’ ability to build exit-like devices into the provision of the goods,’ such as a carbon tax (*ibid.*). Finally, there are “tertiary” public goods, such as “territorial military defense, foreign policy, and many, many others” (342). Exitocracy thus depends on and is embedded within “ordinary” technocracy. Therefore, exitocracy is not merely a conceptual alternative to ordinary technocracy but an institutional or policy alternative only in those domains in which consumer

choice and competition among providers is judged to be the most effective way for individuals to solve—or escape—their problems; and in non-market domains where personal, experiential knowledge is relevant; as well as in cases that arise in the private sphere where voice is more effective (again, in personal settings) than it is in the public sphere of technocracy (331-33). What makes exitocracy, for Friedman, an unusual form of technocracy is simply that it is a technocracy that limits its frontal analytic assault on social and economic problems to those domains where the epistemically superior exit mechanism is not available, and to putting in place conditions for the effective use of the exit mechanism.

However, the affinity between exitocracy and ordinary technocracy goes deeper than just the nesting of the former within the latter, because I think we can usefully describe exitocracy as an “architectural” model of technocracy. This is a sort of second-order model that attempts to avoid prediction and control, but holds that laws and institutions can be designed to promote the emergence and competitive selection of effective solutions to the problems faced by individuals. As in an ordinary technocracy, this involves designing and building laws, regulations, and institutions, and it depends on a theory of the implications of social complexity.³ It reminds me of what Hayek recommended in *The Road to Serfdom* as “liberal” (as opposed to “socialist”) planning, which involves “an intelligently designed and continually adjusted legal framework” (Hayek [1944] 2001, 40), one “designed both to preserve competition and to make it operate as beneficially as possible.” That this echoed the rationalist politics to which he was so strongly opposed was picked up on by Oakeshott. The significance of Hayek’s *Road to Serfdom*, he wrote, is “not the cogency of his doctrine, but the fact that it is a doctrine. A plan to resist all planning may be better than its opposite, but it belongs to the same style of politics. And only in a society already deeply infected with Rationalism will the conversion of the traditional resources of resistance to the tyranny of Rationalism into a self-conscious ideology be considered a strengthening of those resources” (Oakeshott 1962, 21-22). The architectural metaphor is not perfect, but I think it works in one respect: rather than constant intervention, the architect makes some sort of claim about the future performance of the building, the behavior it will encourage, how people will live in it, and so

³ Hayek, for instance, developed a theory of complex systems which purported to show the impossibility of knowledge sufficient for prediction and control of the system, but claimed the possibility of knowledge of behavioral “patterns.” Economics, he thought, can tell us “under which general conditions a pattern of this sort will form itself,” which in turn “enable[s] us to create such conditions and to observe whether a pattern of the kind predicted will appear” (Hayek [1964] 1967, 36). Thus, while Hayek powerfully rejected the aspiration to prediction and control of complex social systems that he thought underpinned any attempt at economic planning, he regarded his own approach as one grounded firmly in the science of complex systems.

on. But once it is built there is to be no ongoing monitoring of, and intervention in, the behavior of the inhabitants.

Thinking of exitocracy as a form of architectural technocracy draws attention to the “exitocrats” who would be charged with designing, building, and maintaining such effective frameworks for competitive interaction (340ff). We might then ask similar questions about the character of the exitocrat that Friedman asks about the character of the epistocrat. Friedman associates technocracy (in both epistocratic and citizen versions) with a kind of arrogance, which in turn is rooted in a simple-society ontology. He associates the recognition of complexity, by contrast, with intellectual humility. He cites a psychology study by Fernbach et al. (2013) suggesting that asking people about the mechanisms by which policies would have their intended effects, rather than simply eliciting their reasons for supporting a policy (i.e., asking about their objectives in supporting it, without asking about how a policy would achieve the objective) prompts the recognition of complexity and reduces epistemic confidence in policy opinions, which we can see as signaling a kind of humility (295). Yet, while there might indeed be a sort of epistemological humility implied by the complex-society ontology, it might also ground its own kind of arrogance: “We don’t know much, but at least we know what we don’t know, and that’s a lot more than those people who don’t know what they don’t know!” Indeed, the history of architectural technocracy suggests that the “complex-society” ontology can come with its own glib certainties and a belief in the ability of judicious exitocrats to beneficially structure laws and policies to promote exit and competition. At the end of the chapter on public ignorance, Friedman notes that critics seeking to deflate the “intentions heuristic” by showing the complexity of modern society will themselves be embedded within their own ideology (313), but he does not consider the exitocratic variant of this problem. For real-world examples, consider the role of Western economists in the restructuring of economic, legal and political institutions of post-Soviet Eastern Europe (Johnson 2016) and South America (Dargent 2015), as well as the more general power of economists in limiting the scope of democratic politics (Levy and Peart 2016). The selective pressures that favor arrogance and overconfidence among experts involved in first-order problem-solving should also apply to experts designing second-order exitocratic structures. Experts who firmly believe in the basic complexity of society and the limits to human knowledge should believe, as well, that this justifies the insulation of exitocratic policy design from the misguided interventions of the purveyors of the simple-society ontology. It would be logical for them to seek to escape or limit a democratic politics which seemed unable to recognize that complexity.

Moreover, we still have to confront the question of how the scope and boundaries of exitocracy are to be determined. Who decides which issues or problems are best approach directly through frontal analytic assault and which problems are best handled indirectly in the private sphere, as through the mechanism of exit (322)? Consider a problem like flooding. The protection of one's property from flooding could be viewed as an individual problem. I could then build a watertight wall around my property (and a range of private providers might compete to provide the best individualized flood protection system). However, in the event of a flood, the water I keep off my property will be distributed to my neighbors' property. This might seem an open-and-shut argument for collective flood management (it certainly seems that way to the Dutch), and indeed for the use of the coercive power of the state to prevent free riding on collective solutions. But it is disputable—and it is disputed—in places like Miami, where there are buildings with private sea walls (Kuper 2020). We then find ourselves faced with a conflict over whether to regard something as a (possibly tertiary?) public good or as a matter better left to exitocratic mechanisms. This conflict raises normative and empirical questions about how to evaluate two very different strategies, one framed around individual problem-solving, another around collective problem solving. And it raises the question how we are then to decide between them.

One option at this point would be to invoke democracy as some part of the answer. Jack Knight and James Johnson (2011, 19), for instance, describe democracy as the presumptively best way of “negotiat[ing] unavoidable social disagreement over institutional arrangements.” Their argument is that “democracy enjoys a priority precisely because it is uniquely useful in approaching the crucial, complex, and conflictual tasks involved in the ongoing process of selecting, implementing, and maintaining effective institutional arrangements” (Knight and Johnson 2011, 12). In so far as democracy introduces diverse ideas and agents into collective decision processes, and involves “an institutionalised process of experimentation, inquiry and testing” (ibid, 159), it manifests competition at the second-order level of “selecting, implementing and maintaining *effective* institutional arrangements” (ibid, 19). Yet this option is not really open to Friedman, not least because (to stick with the flood example) those sorts of judgments move far away from our direct experience. We might say, of course, that we directly experience a flood. But we do not directly experience a *risk* of flooding. And when a flood happens, whether we experience it as an act of god, or a manageable risk, or an effect of climate change, or something else entirely, is a matter of interpretation. And then we are back with Friedman's basic problem—that we don't know enough to make these judgments, or at least, these judgments would seem to be as much of a problem for exitocracy as they are for what he calls “democratic technocracy.” That is, it is hard to

see on this account how the politics of deciding the boundaries of exitocracy would not just reproduce the sort of pathological politics produced by disputes over first-order problem-solving.

The boundary problem raises a further question. I take it that Friedman conceives exitocracy as a sort of self-limiting technocracy, one which “foregoes” a direct approach to social problems when those problems are better left to individuals and competing private providers. But how exactly is it supposed to limit itself? On Friedman’s account, it’s hard to see how this limitation could be internal to democratic politics itself. His central argument for the beneficial epistemic effects of exitocracy is that exit is epistemically superior to voice. Indeed, he regards the “habituat[ion] . . . to advocacy, to debate, to arguing and otherwise attempting to persuade” as a pathological feature of technocratic culture (344). He describes the addiction to argument about matters beyond one’s comprehension as itself a product of a political culture that makes people think they should have opinions about policies. Democratic technocracy habituates citizens into “hot hatreds.” The “mental habits fostered by regular use of the exit mechanism,” by contrast, generate a “cold rationality” (345). Even if we accept this view of the consequences of citizen-technocratic subjecthood, it does not explain how we might get from there to exitocracy, or how the self-limitation involved in exitocracy can arise within a citizen-technocratic political culture. It seems to me that Friedman’s claims for a self-limiting form of politics characterized by cold rationality don’t make sense unless we understand those limits as coming from somewhere other than democratic politics itself.

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By framing Friedman’s argument in terms of a distinction between engineering and architectural models of technocracy, I mean both to emphasize the continuities between them and to raise questions about their relation to democratic politics. Exitocracy implies policies, laws, and regulations designed by various experts and voted on by citizen-technocrats. Even though neither citizens nor experts in this scenario are supposed to be engaging in “engineering”-style first-order problem solving, they are nonetheless called to make judgments about how to organize and adjust legal and regulatory systems to promote competition, how to “build exit-like devices” (341), and to judge what counts as a public good and what counts as a domain best given over to private

competition and exit. There are thus potential continuities between engineering and architectural models of technocracy both at the level of the role and character of experts—epistocrats and exitocrats alike—and at the level of ordinary citizens—citizen-technocrats and citizen-exitocrats. Why, then, would an exitocracy not exhibit a similar sort of expert arrogance and heated popular politics that we (arguably) find in the politics of a mixed democratic/epistocratic technocracy such as our own? (The political conflicts in the United States over the question of whether health care, for instance, is best thought of as a problem to be dealt with through a frontal analytic assault by a centralized administration or better left to competition and exit seems shot through with hot hatreds, even though it turns on something like a question of the boundaries of exitocracy.) Friedman suggests that our politics generates too much heat by requiring both citizens and experts to address problems at a collective level that would be better handled by individuals and competing private providers. Exitocracy would take the heat out of politics by imposing a self-limitation on the sorts of demands it makes on citizens and experts alike. Yet where is the self-limitation that is characteristic of the cooler politics of exitocracy supposed to come from? It is hard to see, on Friedman's account, how such self-limitation can arise from within democratic politics (that is, from within democratic technocracy or epistocracy). It is for this reason that architectural technocracy—at least to me—implies the dethroning of politics by limiting the scope for *democratic* technocracy.

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