

Tilo Schabert's Architectonic Science

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Abstract

Tilo Schabert's *The Second Birth of Man: On the Political Beginnings of Human Existence* consists of a restatement, under modern conditions, of Aristotle's claim that politics is an "architectonic science." Schabert's discussion of creativity, of bodies, of soul, of God, of freedom, and of friendship creates a synthetic account of political action in its fundamental sense. In this article I trace the arc of this synthesis and assess what is ever ancient and ever new in this remarkable book.

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For the beginning seems to be more than half of the whole, and many of the things that are inquired after become illuminated along with it.¹

Tilo Schabert's *The Second Birth of Man: On the Political Beginnings of Human Existence* contains an Epilogue with the full title, "On the Dignity and Importance of Politics: A Eulogy of the Human Creativity unto Government".² Written with the same spirit of respect for political action as Aristotle, Alexis de Tocqueville, Raymond Aron, Hannah Arendt, and Eric Voegelin, it should be required reading for every political scientist to understand better the dignity of political practice, and to understand better the nature of political science as a practical science.

The Epilogue contains an autobiographical statement in which Schabert explains how he came to the insights concerning political creativity contained in the book the reader has just completed. It also contains an elaboration of the argument contained in the book. In defending the dignity of political action, Schabert argues that, "[p]olitical science is the architectonic science for the architecture of the polis".³ Political creativity involves bringing the polis to its "proper form" or, to use a term Schabert uses throughout the book, its *Gestalt*.⁴

Political science serves political creativity. But it serves not simply by providing political knowledge for the task of governing (e.g., in the form of counsel to princes). All sciences take part in the governing creativity directed at the *polis*. But it is political science that has as its subject matter the governing of this creativity: 'Political science usually starts with a scrutiny of government(s). It 'ends' in the form of a study of political creativity, where 'ends' has to be understood in the Aristotelian sense: achieving, in a process of formation, the proper form.'⁵

With this statement, Schabert restates Aristotle's insight that political science is a practical science, the "architectonic" science whose concern is the government of the *polis*.⁶ But Schabert does not merely restate Aristotle's insight as if he were simply writing a commentary. Rather, Schabert's restatement signals also a "new" political science. It is not new in the sense that it 'peddle[s] novelties but rather, on the contrary', it strives 'for a knowledge that can be gleaned from the history of philosophical and political thought. Therefore, we begin (or continue) on this path at the point marked for it in advance.'⁷ He cites his predecessors in this regard, Niccolò Machiavelli, Ibn Khaldûn, Alexis de Tocqueville, who explained their departures by the insight that the reality of politics failed to match the ways politics had been understood. Political science requires recalibration when it fails to understand political reality.

What are the new realities that necessitate a new “Schabertian” architectonic science? In what sense is his science new? How does his science relate to the “old”? The answer to these questions resides, I think, in Schabert’s innovative argument concerning political creativity. This has never been done before. This is why he claims, in the passage cited above, that political science “ends” in the form of a study of political creativity’. Schabert’s inquiries into something called “political creativity”, drawn both from the study of philosophical texts and from empirical research of creative “princes”, leads him to write this book, *The Second Birth*, which places political creativity in the spotlight. Schabert’s understanding of creativity will have to be explored to determine how it yields his conclusion concerning the architectural role of political science.

The other way of answering the question is to bear in mind not only the Epilogue of the book, but also its Epigraph. In a book devoted to creativity and beginnings, special attention must be paid to the very first words of the book, which cite the *Epic of Gilgamesh*: ‘My friend, why are the great gods in council?’⁸ In understanding the end of political science, the form of the *polis*, we must bear in mind also that its beginning, which also contains its end, is friendship. Friendship is, in Thomas Heilke’s account of its theme in *Gilgamesh*, ‘a primary experience, not a derivative one. Indeed, one may argue that notions of politics arise out of experiences of friendship, and not the reverse.’⁹ Indeed, as Endiku notes in his question to his friend, political creativity extends to the gods. So the study of political creativity involves the end of the *polis*. It involves friendship and it involves the gods (and God). The book begins with the words ‘my friend’, and concludes with a declaration that political science is the architectonic science. Just what is the scope of this architectonic science we call political science?

Political Creativity and Beginnings

Let us begin with beginnings. As Aristotle teaches, with the beginning we are already half-way to the end. In “At the Start”, the second named chapter of *Second Birth*, which follows the “Introduction” (the chapters are not numbered), Schabert draws a crucial distinction between a “beginning” (*Anfang*) and a “start” (*Beginn*). A “start” is an absolute start, it is prior to time and thus creates time.¹⁰ Conversely, a “beginning” takes place in time and space, and thereby immediately entails something else: ‘Out of beginnings something arises. Beginnings are beginnings of... In their difference from the start, beginnings bring power into play, which is expressed by the restriction of the start through that beginning.’¹¹

Schabert’s point may be illustrated by an example. According to the book of Genesis, God created the world. This is a start. One might say this is unconditioned and unconstrained creativity. This is the creativity that modernity aspires to, as Schabert indicates when he lists the ‘genetic setting of the scholarly work to which my reflections refer’.¹² Schabert’s reflection upon beginnings shows why his account of creativity is in stark contrast to the unrestrained and hubristic modern approach.

For Schabert, creativity is less like God’s absolute creation and more like condition of humanity being called by God to ‘go forth and multiply’. Beginning is begetting. To begin means immediately to be subject to constraints:

In order for something to arise, it must be given a *Gestalt* – or, we could also say, it must be fixed – at the beginning, for it could not arise unless it was begun in the direction of

this or that *Gestalt*. The beginning is the first power; and this power gives to what arises its constitution and also rules over it.¹³

Indeed, it is misleading to state, as I just did, that to begin implies being subject to constraints, if one takes those constraints to be externally imposed. For from where do those constraints emerge? From the beginning itself. In Schabert's statement just quoted, a beginning *is* power, and as such has its form or *Gestalt* as beginning. Or Aristotle again: "The beginning seems to be more than half of the whole."

Let two examples fill in the *Gestalt* of beginning. In the third chapter, which bears the title "In Number", Schabert argues that number is the "handle" (*Griff*) of creativity. If beginning something means to give it form, number is the primary way of giving form. Where there is One, there is also many. Citing Plato's *Parmenides* and the *Dao De Jing*, Schabert explains: "[e]verything created is ordered in a sequence, since every single created thing follows one after the other and thus forms a quantity that is to be counted from the One to the many and so on to the infinite".¹⁴ Before there are created "things" and "bodies", there is number and there are numbers. Socrates makes this point in the *Republic* when he tells Glaucon and Adeimantus that our sensory knowledge depends upon knowledge of number. Before we can see one finger we must know what one is; to know one is also to know many.¹⁵ Number is the "handle" of creativity because, through it, beginnings take their form, from unity to multiplicity.

The other example is less metaphysical. In one of the few occurrences of the word "nature" in a book that refers so much to Aristotle, Schabert states that a work must 'be recognized from the beginning as having a 'nature of its own,' and must be directed precisely by that nature toward the work started'.¹⁶

In a footnote, Schabert explains the meaning of the phrase 'nature of its own' by discussing the experiences of several famous authors whose books were developed as if they had a 'will of its own'. The example of Thomas Mann's description of writing his *Buddenbrooks* is most illuminating. He describes the book as having a 'will of its own', which suggests he was carried away by following out the initial idea or revelation about the book. The book was independent of the author. It had its own "nature". Writing the book was a matter of following the logic of sequence of that nature. Some of us have experienced similar inspiration when writing an article or book. Writing, in some circumstances, can be a matter simply of writing words while being, in Mann's words, 'carried along in its wave'. In doing so, the author serves the *Gestalt* of the argument; the task of writing is that of instantiating the epiphany in space and time.

However, Mann exaggerates when he claims the book created itself and was not created by him. There is another thought present as well in Mann's statement, and in Schabert's account of creativity. The act of writing is also the work of subjecting oneself to the constraints of the power of creativity. In the same statement to which Schabert refers, Mann describes he discovered himself through the activity of writing: 'I learned that a human being does not get to know himself except through action.'¹⁷ Only in acting (i.e., writing) toward one's purpose does creativity issue into its form. In writing, we sweat over the details of how to choose the most appropriate words and phrases, how best to construct sentences, paragraphs, and entire arguments, in order to reach our destination. In another part of his book, Schabert describes his own creativity in this manner: 'We will thus continue on that path of reflection opened up by our

insight into the political evidence of our body, a path on which this insight was also our lodestar.¹⁸

American novelist Mark Helprin once characterized the task of writing in comparable terms as a matter of throwing a stone into the water and then swimming after it. He writes:

I build everything toward the last sentence, which is the first thing that occurs to me in writing a book. It's like throwing a stone into a lake and then swimming and diving to fetch it. You can swim all over the place, you can dive and weave among the reeds, you can do anything you want, but when you finish, and you grasp the stone, the path between it and the place you start is a straight line. This "chalk line" is what I use to keep my intentions honorable, my plot simple, and my themes in reverberation.¹⁹

The task of actual writing is like the act of swimming. We are subject to the constraints of the water current – of language, of syntax, of grammar, of style – as we struggle to reach our destination. Mann (and Schabert) agrees when he notes a human being only knows himself through action. This an Aristotelian point, as when Aristotle argues that what makes a human being just is not his or her opinions about justice, but his or her choices. Practical wisdom, he says, is a "truth disclosing" activity where the "truth" is disclosed in the performance of practical wisdom, not in the product as it is with *technē*.²⁰ In making a choice to be just, we make a choice to know and be ourselves.

Politics of Bodies

As noted above, Socrates reminds us that before we can have sensory knowledge, we must have knowledge of number, the "handle" of creativity. But sensory knowledge we must have, and this comes through the body. With bodily birth, we enter a physical world whereby we 'can no longer be 'overlooked' or 'passed over' '.²¹ Body is the second step (after number) whereby the power of creativity is spatially handled. Schabert writes: 'We human beings learn political science through our bodies. Our bodies establish relations among us. They tell us we are political beings simply because we are spatial beings.'²² True, our bodies are needy and our political affairs take place amidst the scarcity that physical nature places before us. The *polis* comes into being to provide the necessities of life, as Aristotle teaches. But Schabert places the "second birth" of politics prior to that, in the very fact we are spatially extended beings, not angels who take up no space, who must navigate and negotiate with one another (and on behalf of one another).²³

Yet, as pure physicality, bodies are insufficient for politics: 'Everyone is lonely in his or her body.' 'There is nothing that would render them sociable to each other. Bodies by themselves are just bodies, not a society.'²⁴ Yet bodies are "eloquent" (*beredit*) toward one another because, in the "in-between" space that lies between human bodies, 'they say the same things of themselves: weakness, need, predicament'.²⁵ Schabert refers to this "eloquence" as the 'doctrine of human bodies for the welfare of beings', a locution he describes both as paradoxical and purposefully as doctrine. It is paradoxical because bodies are both silent toward one another as well as "eloquent". We identify with one another in this basic condition of the care for one another on account of our bodies. It is a "doctrine" because its truth is known as a dictum of reason, and therefore universally intelligible on account of the fact of their existence. It is a

dictum of reason because bodies, which can be understood as the handle of creativity after number, are the place where creativity is transmitted unto others:

“Human beings, therefore, are political from the moment of their worldly beginning, with no intervention needed on their part... As they are, they are in form, and as form they find themselves in the midst of a process of forms, in which and through which things are sorted out... They are actors in the politics of creation.²⁶

Elsewhere, Schabert describes the “eloquence” of bodies:

No sooner do I imagine being told, for instance, that I (i.e., my body) may no longer move freely in this world than I immediately cast my hopeful glance upon this lodestar, because the promises given us with our body so that we may live in the form of our body radiate from it. We call these promises ‘natural rights’: Every human being is the sovereign of his or her existence.²⁷

Politics of the Soul

“In Consciousness”, the title of the sixth named chapter, Schabert discusses the origins of politics in the work of the soul. He cites Socrates’ question to Glaucon and Adeimantus in the *Republic*:

Doesn’t the soul have an office (*psyches ergon*) which you couldn’t discharge with anything else in the world, as for example managing (*epimeleomai*), ruling (*archein*), deliberating (*bouleuein*), and the like?... Shall we say that living too is the office of the soul?²⁸

Political creativity is the creativity of the soul’s constitution, and

[N]o less complex than the great invention of modern political theory called the “constitutional state.” The “separation of powers” is a structure of the soul.... When the soul “manages,” “rules,” and “deliberates,” it is divided in a threefold manner and yet is active politically as one “soul” just like a constitutional state. We recognize here the three powers: judiciary and administration (“management”), the government (“ruling”), and, finally the representative and legislative corporation (“deliberation”). The beginning of all governing is in the soul. Human society has its existence here, in that tension between multiplicity and the One in which alone plurality can exist, and here also the consciousness of a human being is constituted like a commonwealth, when his or her soul relates to its parts as a whole.²⁹

The reader will recognize this as the source of a phrase that was common in previous generations. One might refer to a person as having a “noble” or “strong” constitution when describing someone’s character. Each person is a *polis*, which explains why philosophers Plato and Aristotle insisted that the sign of a good and sociable character is its constancy, where constancy depends on good governing of one’s self: “The soul is political by itself – the soul is the politician that a human being always encounters in him- or herself.”³⁰ In governing oneself

well, one's nature as a political animal is enhanced. The good commonwealth within makes one ready to live in a good commonwealth with others.

The good commonwealth, the *kallipolis*, thus already exists before it is “staged” in the dialogue called the *Republic*:

The *kallipolis* already ‘existed’ before human beings discovered it. It lies in the act of putting thoughtful dialogue on stage; it is not fashioned for the first time in this dialogue. A paradigm's strength lies precisely in its power of actualization. Human beings can follow a paradigm because it is already a form of their actuality.³¹

The creation story of the *Republic* is not a “utopia” or an ideal to be “applied” to human actuality.³² The *Republic* tells the “whole story of creation,” which is prior to human actuality. *Kallipolis* is “there” before human beings find themselves already taking part in its creation. That is why it cannot be “applied.”

Undergraduate students understand the point immediately. They understand that justice depends on wisdom; it is better to be ruled by someone wise and just than someone ignorant and unjust, and they also understand it is better that wisdom rule their own souls than otherwise. The more difficult lesson, perhaps the most difficult, is getting them to carry out that self-rule, the precondition of the justice of the city, because self-rule is exceedingly difficult to practice. Aristotle notes this when he points out that ‘people believe it is easy to be just, but it is not’.³³

Politics of God

Indeed, rule over one's internal commonwealth is difficult. We must be taught, or reminded, of what we already know: ‘This is the feast: to see the creation without its falling apart, to sketch the ‘city’ of human beings without its becoming deformed.’³⁴ We shall return to Schabert's term, “feast”, below when discussing friendship. For now, in our journey along the arc of political creativity that Schabert is marking out, it is worth noting that the *Republic*, as a creative evocation of creativity, saves the tale of *kallipolis* from creativity itself. It allows us to ‘see the creation without its falling apart’. Schabert points out that, in the “history of beginnings” that Plato tells, humans grasped ‘*Gestalten* of power that conferred upon human beings a creative force such as only a ‘god’ possesses vis-à-vis human beings: a creative power to give form or a creative power to annihilate’.³⁵ The creative power that gives human beings their “second birth” also provides the occasion for its own deformation. Creativity suggests political rule is god-like. It seems to point in that direction: ‘God is a politician, *kyrios kyriōn*, a magistrate of the world.’³⁶ ‘Politics is the mimesis of God. Or, to speak figuratively, politics is the ‘divine hand,’ and, in reaching for it, human beings reach for their own life.’³⁷

To create is also to fall apart; the two go together. Politics is an act of humans caring for humans so they do not fall apart, and this effort is “divine”:

They seek a sort of actuality that is more “divine” than “human” for the world created by their own care. In visualizing this actuality, what really is at stake for them is their world – their world in their midst of the infinite number of existing or possible things, the things that are and then are not, the ones that are continuously one way and yet again a different way. This is a “divine” mode of actuality. “Only what is most divine among

all things,” Plato says, “has the character of existing in one and the same manner and of being the same.” But exactly the same thing is true of human care, i.e., of the project of their politics. The world of human beings is a “world” only in a manner that is continuously one, identical, and the same. However, everything that is in the hands of human beings slips away from their hands.³⁸

Political creativity is as paradoxical as it is dangerous. In creating a ‘little world of order’, as Eric Voegelin calls it, human beings mimic God’s creation of an everlasting world. Voegelin notes how political action seeks to shelter human beings from forces of destruction that are part and parcel of creativity itself. This sheltering mimics divine creativity.

For this same reason, Yves Simon speaks of the ‘virtual immortal life of the community’ that compensates for the brevity of individual existence.³⁹ More recently, Pierre Manent has argued that freedom and the common good depend upon the protection of God because the common good,

which depends on us, is nevertheless bigger than us, too big for us. We are tempted to appropriate it wholly for ourselves, seeing ourselves as the exclusive authors of this good. When we do so, the nation becomes an object of idolatry, an idol that, in the name of its incomparable particularity or its unequalled universality, demands human sacrifices.⁴⁰

Simon and Manent echo Aristotle’s understanding of the common good as ‘greater and more divine (*theioteron*) than the private good’.⁴¹ For Aristotle as well, the rule of law and therefore law-giving ‘is then no longer a ‘human’ rule. For law is ‘set’ explicitly against human desires and passions; in a certain sense it is set against human beings themselves.’⁴²

The all too human effort to care for the commonwealth is to keep it ‘existing in one and the same manner and of being the same’, which is the same mode as divine creativity. For this reason Schabert cites Cicero stating: “There is no activity that comes as close to the power of the divine (*deorum virtus*) as the founding of political societies (*civitates novas condere*) or the preservation of those already in existence (*conservare iam conditas*).”⁴³ For this reason, too, Schabert cites Madison’s observation of the manner in which the American republic was created despite the numerous forces of falling apart and disorder:

The real wonder is that so many difficulties should have been surmounted, and surmounted with a unanimity almost as unprecedented as it must have been unexpected. It is impossible for any man of candor to reflect on this circumstance without partaking of the astonishment. It is impossible for the man of pious reflection not to perceive in it a finger of that *Almighty hand* which has been so frequently and signally extended to our relief in the critical stages of the revolution.⁴⁴

As Plato knew, political rule is hermetic. Hermes, the messenger of the gods, the unifier of similars and dissimilars, the most creative of gods, was also the patron of political foundings,⁴⁵ inhabiting that space above individuals in order to co-ordinate and rule them in like-mindedness is miraculous. Schabert notes how, for the

‘beautiful city,’ society, power, and thought are in thorough correspondence; they are reflections of each other and constitute a triad – one could be tempted to use the word ‘trinity’ here – in which they are different from one another and yet against equal to one another.”⁴⁶

To rule is to mimic God because one must enter a dimension ‘more divine (*theioteion*) than the private good’. Therein lies the danger of political creativity confusing itself with godlike power and wisdom, and of idolatry and tyranny.⁴⁷ Schabert notes:

Every form of governing, therefore, requires power. But how much? From the standpoint of governing, the logical answer would be that there cannot be enough of it. To govern means to put something in motion, and an infinity of things can be put in motion. Every experience of governing is accompanied by the experience of a ‘lack’ of power. In other words, more power must be added to the already existing power, and this hunger cannot be satisfied.⁴⁸

Falling apart is perpetual and knows no limit; so too creativity knows no limit. It seeks divine omnipotence.

If we are honest, we recognize that, in recognizing there is no limit to the power of creativity, we recognize its limit. We recognize that we cannot possibly exercise omnipotence. The person whose *eros* deludes him toward omnipotence is tyrannical. In reaching for omnipotence, he is extreme, chaotic, dispersed, and falling apart:

An extreme human being is an undecided human being – always and everywhere. It annoys him that a rose is a rose, for he would like for it to be a carnation. But it is still a rose. How enraged he becomes because the world does not dance to his bizarre tunes!... Such a human being always perceives himself as another, as someone who at this precise moment he is not. He has fallen apart, fallen into parts, parts that are purely and only parts. Anytime he is something, he lacks his self.⁴⁹

Political creativity suggests to us human beings that we might be like gods. Therein lies both the nobility and danger of political creativity.

Politics of Freedom

The tale the *Republic* saves is crucial because it teaches us the paradigm of the true *kallipolis*. Thought must steer action. Human beings have freedom and can make a choice. At the beginning of the chapter, “In Freedom”, which is the final named chapter before the Epilogue and so serves as the peak of the argument that has been ascending throughout the book,⁵⁰ Schabert recapitulates the subject matter of the previous chapters, referred to as *Gestalten*, as a series of choices: “The *Gestalt* assigns to human beings the task... of relating to the *Gestalten* pre-given to them in a ‘free’ manner and to make a choice.”⁵¹ As Søren Kierkegaard has Judge Wilhelm encourage his friend, the aesthete, to make a choice about existence in the either/or, so too Schabert encourages ‘my friend’, the reader, to make a choice between form and formlessness among a series of moments in political creativity. I reproduce the fifth one, which I believe takes us closest to our “lodestar”:

Will I remain silent and unsociable in my thought, that is to say, will I refuse to be in community with others, who are always already present in my thought? Or will I join the feast of thought and find in this experience the answer to the question: How do I become a human being?⁵²

We must choose. What must we choose? We must choose to understand power in such a way that it can keep our lives 'existing in one and the same manner and of being the same'. We must choose to be powerful, a thought Schabert calls the 'paradox of freedom'.⁵³ We can only be free when others share that freedom with us:

Only in such a space of freedoms will the care for my existence become free and will I be able to let my life flourish.... In order for this space to become and continue to be a reality, it must be 'founded,' 'constituted,' and 'governed.'⁵⁴

The 'paradox of freedom' requires a requisite 'governing freedom' in order for it 'to become and continue to be a reality'. If freedom lacks power to sustain it, it dissolves into anarchy. If the power to create freedom is too powerful, it is despotic.

Instead, in order for the human mimicry of divine creativity to sustain freedom, it requires 1) partitioning all political power, 2) limiting all power in time, 3) making it possible to recall holders of power from office before the end of term.⁵⁵ In short, the paradox of power to create and sustain freedom requires first the establishment of a sufficiently strong power, and then the diffusion and confusion of that power. This is the formula of James Madison in "Federalist #10" when he writes: 'In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself.'⁵⁶ Such "regency of power" is an ongoing act of political creativity. Indeed,

governing under the paradox of power hinders itself, by means of its own mechanisms, from serving anything other than our freedom. The construction is a work created by art; it consists only of measures, rules, and aggregates ("institutions") for the production as well as for the negation of power.⁵⁷

Schabert's studies of former Boston mayor Kevin White and former French president François Mitterand are case studies of this "art".⁵⁸

There is a further paradox to the "In Freedom" chapter and noticing this brings us closer to our "lodestar". Schabert's description of the "paradox of power" and "paradox of freedom" strongly suggests the arrangement of power within the liberal state. So-called liberal notions of natural rights, state of nature, equality, justice, individual freedom, political origins in bodies, natural versus civil freedom, and the liberal notion that politics is artifice are woven into his discussion. Yet, when Schabert lists the criteria for judging whether the "regency of power" has been a success, which he does on the very last page of the last chapter before the Epilogue (it is the final chapter in the German edition), he cites two statements by Aristotle and two by Cicero. The liberal philosophers, most notably Locke, Montesqueiu, Mill, Madison, and others whose

ideas helped form the liberal democratic way of thinking about these issues are missing. Why is this?

One reason may be that Schabert finds little original in their thought. For instance, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's explanation of the origin of political society in 'the first man who fenced in a plot of land and dared to say, this is mine', is unoriginal and simply repeating, with less penetration of the problems, the myth of cycles discussed by the Athenian Stranger in Plato's *Laws*.⁵⁹

Another reason may be that much of modern liberal thought misunderstands the political significance of bodies, and is needlessly abstract. Of the "natural man" of John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, he sees 'only a para-empirical product; it is also put together in thought without consideration of anthropogonic logic, a logic that is demonstrated in a truly exemplary manner in every human being in the nakedness of his or her bodily existence'.⁶⁰ He explains this in his explanation of the "place" of the 'doctrine of human bodies for the welfare of human beings':

Where is this place? We have to reply that it is not found in the bodily birth of human beings, because this birth is precisely that which individualizes; nor could it be found in some "state of nature" (which is always a purely imaginary thing); nor in some "social contract" (which is always appended after the fact, given that people must have already come to a political understanding before they could even begin to think of entering into such a contract.⁶¹

What seems deficient in liberal thought then appears to be the problem Schabert sees generally in all modern political thought, which is the illusory liberation of the will from the constraints of the "paradox of power." Even when liberals get it right in practice (as nomothetes, in the case of Madison), they seem not to possess the full theoretical apparatus to understand why.

Politics Brought to its "Proper Form": Friendship in the Feast of Thought

A further clue for Schabert's use of ancient over modern sources in his final statement on the paradox of freedom and of power may be found in the statements by Aristotle and Cicero themselves that Schabert provides. Each of the statements focuses on freedom, but freedom as conducive to community or like-mindedness (*koinonia*). Two pages earlier, Schabert formulates the relationship this way: 'A governing freedom renders everyone who is united under it my friend and, when it is a matter of defending this freedom, my ally.'⁶² Fellow citizens are friends and allies. Liberal philosophers brilliantly explain the nature of freedom and the dispersion of power to sustain the power for freedom, but they fail to understand its final purpose. The liberal polity thus fails to achieve, 'in a process of formation, the proper form'.⁶³ Only a power whose aim is friendship can achieve the proper form of political society.

How do humans do this? By choosing to be sociable and joining the "feast of thought". Schabert notes how, for Aristotle, 'human beings would desire to live together 'even if they felt no need for mutual assistance'.⁶⁴ This recalls Aristotle's own statement concerning the path of political creativity: 'while coming into being for the sake of living, it exists for the sake of living well'.⁶⁵ Even so, not just any human would desire to live together with others. Only those humans whose "lodestar" is to live well choose this option.

Living well means practicing friendship. Schabert signifies this in his discussion of “the feast of thought”, which is the paradigm of human community:

[Humans] find the start that their predicament demands of them in thought. Their care for themselves is supported by the care that makes thought into a feast, into a community of human beings with human beings. Thought is the certainty of care.... Among all *Gestalten* of power, thought is the one that can bring them closer to the fulfilment of their care – the civilization that was assigned to them – than any other. They find the community that is to be founded in the sociability of thought; in the latter the former is always present. Thought is what is common to all of them; in it, they are always already political.⁶⁶

Thought is sociable. We carry on dialogue with ourselves as part of our individual task of self-government. If we remain true to our own internal dialogue, we of necessity carry on dialogue with others: ‘In thinking we are not alone, because in thinking we hear that we are spoken to.’⁶⁷

Aristotle explains this point when he argues that the very work (*energeia*) of our intellect is to know ourselves, which necessitates that we practice friendship with others. Our capacity to know ourselves depends upon our friends helping to know us, and upon we knowing them:

And if a serious person is the same way toward a friend as he is toward himself (since the friend is another self), then just as one’s own *being* is choiceworthy for each person, so too, or very nearly so, is that of a friend. But one’s *being* is choiceworthy on account of the awareness of oneself as being good, and such an awareness is pleasant in itself. Therefore one also ought to share in a friend’s awareness that he *is*, and this would come through living together and sharing conversation and thinking; for this would seem to be what living together means in the case of human beings.⁶⁸

Placed in Schabert’s terms, friendship is the “proper form” of politics. It is the “lodestar” or end of politics but it is also at its beginning; it is its precondition and consequence.⁶⁹

As beginning, political creativity ‘means, after all, to begin with the ‘beginning’ a polis and to say why this beginning must be made or – to the extent that human societies already exist – why it has been made’.⁷⁰ Schabert states this to describe how the *kallipolis* of Plato’s *Republic* is a paradigm of creativity. Thinking, in Plato’s *Republic*, is thus at the height of political creativity:

Socrates’s words, written by Plato, expressed the invitation to join in the feast of thought, which founds a community in Plato’s dialogues and also gives our thought its sociability. The motion of the dance takes place in a dialogical *Gestalt* in the dance of words.... In the dance of words, we follow our thought as if our thought were that which leads us.⁷¹

But thinking is never a start: ‘human beings also experience a recollection of the divine therein.’⁷² We always begin thinking as conversation and in a conversation that has preceded us: ‘Conversation and thought go on simultaneously.’⁷³ Schabert observes that, unlike political creativity, the feast of thought, as the paradigm for political creativity, is already

“governed” in such a way that it is already a conversation. Before I begin, therefore, thought has already been put on stage.... We cannot make a start with thought. However, this barrier is precisely what provides human beings with stability. They find an extraordinary certainty in this barrier.... Their care for themselves is supported by the care that makes thought into a feast, into the community of human beings with human beings. Thought is the certainty of care.... Thinking, they know that the start has already been made for any beginning that they make in thinking.⁷⁴

Recall that the paradigm of the just regime has already been laid out in our souls and in heaven, as Plato has Socrates point out in the *Republic*. Thinking through to this paradigm can help inoculate oneself against the temptation of tyranny, of thinking that in political rulership we can exercise the godlike ‘character of existing in one and the same manner and of being the same’. Thinking through to the paradigm helps us understand that political creativity must necessarily be mimicry of divine creativity. Experience in thought as the “certainty of care” reminds us that political creativity offers no such level of care or certainty. And the practice of thinking is done with friends.

In the *Republic*, Plato describes a conversation among friends and his text is addressed to an unnamed friend. Socrates’ leadership in bringing his friends along is an act of friendship, an invitation to join the “feast of thought”. In addressing his “new political science” concerning political creativity to “my friend”. Schabert shows how political friendship is enacted for the present age. For this reason, his political science can be called an “architectonic science”.

Notes

¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by Joe Sachs, (Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing, 2002), I.7.1098b8-9.

² Tilo Schabert, *The Second Birth: On the Political Beginnings of Human Existence*, translated by Javier Ibáñez-Noé, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 123-29. This volume is the English translation of *Die zweite Geburt des Menschen: Von den politischen Anfängen menschlicher Existenz*, (München: Verlag Karl Alber GmbH, 2009). The Epilogue appears only in the English language translation (see Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 158n1).

³ Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 126.

⁴ *Gestalt* is italicized and left untranslated throughout English edition but not in the German edition. The German term is not especially technical but the translator seems to have wished to emphasize the untranslated term to remind the reader of the layered visual, aesthetic, and noetic meanings of the term. The reader may find it helpful to keep in mind that the Greek term for “idea” or “form,” *eidōs*, is taken from the vocabulary of viewing statues, whereby the “form” or “idea” presents itself for our viewing.

⁵ Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 127.

⁶ Or as Sachs translates Aristotle: “It would seem to belong to the one that is most governing and most a master art (*magista architektonikos*)” (*Nicomachean Ethics*, I.2.1094a30).

⁷ Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 22.

⁸ Enkidu, after a dream, addressing Gilgamesh (*Gilgamesh*, 6.11)

⁹ Thomas Heilke, “Friendship in the Civic Order: A Reformation Absence,” in *Friendship and Politics: Essays in Political Thought*, edited by John von Heyking and Richard Avramenko, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 167.

¹⁰ Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 5.

¹¹ Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 6. Emphasis in original.

¹² Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 128. He continues: “A body of research and analysis was to be built up along themes like this: revolution, revolutionary consciousness, the vicissitudes of modernity, the triumph of a radically secular mind, the illusion of human perfectibility, the contortion of language, the moral and intellectual deception unto existential despair” (129). For a similar conclusion, drawn independently from the work considered here, see Boris DeWiel, “Freedom as creativity: On the origin of the positive concept of liberty” *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 2(4) (2003): 42-57.

¹³ Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 6.

¹⁴ Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 9.

¹⁵ Plato, *Republic*, 522b-525d.

¹⁶ Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 5.

¹⁷ Quoted by Schabert, *Second Birth*, 135n6.

¹⁸ Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 118.

¹⁹ Quoted by James Linville, interview with Mark Helprin, “Mark Helprin, The Art of Fiction No. 132,” *The Paris Review*, No. 126, Spring 1993 (<http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/1962/the-art-of-fiction-no-132-mark-helprin>). The quote continues in a fashion comparable to the notion of “beginning” set forth by Schabert: “Knowing the beginning and the end means that the middle is where the surprises are, where the characters and the book take on lives of their own, where the work becomes an adventure—but a disciplined adventure, because the ultimate purpose and the origin are known and firmly kept in mind. This fits quite nicely, in an aesthetic sense, with the notion that God does not play dice with the universe.”

²⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.5.1140b2-8. See III.2.1112a2. Like Schabert, Aristotle uses the analogy of the artisan to describe practical wisdom. Even so, for all the similarities between the two forms of reason, both see the two as fundamentally different for the reason described in the sentence to which this note refers.

²¹ Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 15.

²² Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 16.

²³ See Schabert’s discussion of James Madison’s hypothetical question as to why angels have no need for government (*The Second Birth*, 17-8).

²⁴ Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 20, 21.

²⁵ Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 21.

²⁶ Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 31.

²⁷ Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 118.

²⁸ Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 39, citing *Republic*, 353d.

²⁹ Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 41.

³⁰ Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 115.

³¹ Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 71.

³² This is one of the places where Schabert’s understanding of political creativity differs most drastically from that of Hannah Arendt, whose theory represents an incomplete account of humanity’s “second birth” (see Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 133n3). Schabert’s account of Plato’s *kallipolis* as an evocation of practical political science differs sharply from Arendt’s characterization of it as an act of *technē* (*The Human Condition*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 220-30).

³³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, V.9.1137a5.

³⁴ Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 70.

³⁵ Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 71.

³⁶ Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 5.

³⁷ Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 58. “Divine hand” refers to James Madison. See below. At a key point in the *Laws*, Plato has the Athenian Stranger tell his interlocutors: “Come, then, if we should ever invoke the aid of the god, it’s now that this should happen – at the demonstration of their own existence let their aid be invoked in all seriousness – and holding on as if to some safe cable” (*The Laws of Plato*, trans., Thomas L. Pangle, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 893b). For discussion, see my *The Form of Politics: Aristotle and Plato on Friendship*, (Montréal-Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2016), 184.

³⁸ *The Second Birth*, 58.

³⁹ Yves Simon, *A General Theory of Authority*, 18-19.

- ⁴⁰ Pierre Manent, “Repurposing Europe,” *First Things*, April 2016 (<https://www.firstthings.com/article/2016/04/repurposing-europe>). This article abbreviates his book, *Beyond Radical Secularism*, translated by Ralph C. Hancock, (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2016).
- ⁴¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1.2.1094b7.
- ⁴² Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 107.
- ⁴³ Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 59, citing *De re publica*, 1.7.12.
- ⁴⁴ Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 149n13, citing Madison, Federalist # 37. Emphasis by Schabert.
- ⁴⁵ For elaboration, see my *The Form of Politics: Aristotle and Plato on Friendship*, chapter 4.
- ⁴⁶ Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 69. See also 150n14.
- ⁴⁷ On Augustine’s reflections upon this dilemma of political action, see my *Augustine and Politics as Longing in the World*, (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 51-9.
- ⁴⁸ Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 121. Manent makes a comparable point in the article cited above: “This natural movement of appeal to the Christian God for the special cares of the nation always carries a risk of paganization, to be sure. But for us as citizens, our part is not perfectly to imitate Divine impartiality. We address the Most High from the site of our action and for the common good of the city of which we are citizens.”
- ⁴⁹ Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 91-2.
- ⁵⁰ “The previous pages of this book represent an ‘ascending’ movement” (Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 43). Schabert states this at the start of the chapter, “In Grace,” the seventh named chapter. It is also the middle one. Paired with the following chapter, “In the Divine,” it represents the peak of the subject matter of the book. However, “In Freedom,” the fourteenth chapter, represents the peak of the argument, or at least the ante-chamber before one reaches the Epilogue.
- ⁵¹ Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 133. Emphasis by Schabert.
- ⁵² Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 114.
- ⁵³ Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 118.
- ⁵⁴ Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 119.
- ⁵⁵ Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 121.
- ⁵⁶ Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 140n6. Schabert quotes this passage in the chapter titled, “In Body.” All of his references in the chapter titled, “In Freedom,” are to ancient political philosophers. It should also be noted that Madison does not countenance recall of representatives. I think this is because he would regard this as a populist measure giving people too much direct power, whereas representative government involves indirect power. Recall the first part of the passage of Federalist #10 just quoted: “you must first enable the government to control the governed.”
- ⁵⁷ Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 122.
- ⁵⁸ Schabert, *Boston Politics: The Creativity of Power* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1989); “A Classical Prince: The Style of François Mitterrand,” in *Philosophy, Literature, and Politics: Essays Honoring Ellis Sandoz* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2005), 234-57; *How World Politics is Made: France and the Reunification of Germany*, trans., John Tyler Tuttle (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2009). Schabert’s discussion of the “paradox of power” in the constitutional state is his response to concerns he gives too much weight to executive power, or even autocracy, as embodying the essence of political action (see Dan Avnon, “On Schabert’s ‘Creative Person in Politics,’” in *The Primacy of Persons in Politics: Empiricism and Political Philosophy*, edited by John von Heyking and Thomas Heilke, (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press of America, 2013), 142-48).
- ⁵⁹ Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 156n20.
- ⁶⁰ Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 29.
- ⁶¹ Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 23.
- ⁶² Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 120.
- ⁶³ Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 127.
- ⁶⁴ Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 134n3, quoting *Politics*, 1278b19-22.
- ⁶⁵ Aristotle, *Politics*, translated by Carnes Lord, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 1252b29-30.
- ⁶⁶ Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 67-8.
- ⁶⁷ Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 66.
- ⁶⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, IX.9.1170b6-12. Emphasis part of translator’s effort to communicate the centrality of friendship to the *energeia* of the soul. For elaboration of this passage for political friendship and the “proper form” of “living well,” see my *The Form of Politics: Aristotle and Plato on Friendship*. Here I

acknowledge my debt to Tilo Schabert's scholarship and, of course, his friendship that has helped me to understand these matters. An earlier treatment of the topic engages directly with Schabert's "empirical" studies ("Friendship as Precondition and Consequence of Creativity in Politics," in *The Primacy of Persons in Politics: Empiricism and Political Philosophy*, 79-106).

⁶⁹ See my "Friendship as Precondition and Consequence of Creativity in Politics" and *The Form of Politics*, especially its treatment of festivity as the form taken by political friendship (chapters 1, 3, and 6).

⁷⁰ Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 68.

⁷¹ Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 66-7.

⁷² Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 67.

⁷³ Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 67.

⁷⁴ Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 67-8.

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