What is at Stake in the Question of Technology?

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Review: *Leo Strauss on Democracy, Technology, and Liberal Education*, by Timothy W. Burns (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2021), 201 pp. Hardcover, $95.00.

Because I cannot do justice to all of the many reasons for reading Tim Burns's excellent book on Leo Strauss, I will try instead to say why I think the book is especially helpful to readers of Strauss, in particular, those readers who see in Strauss the resources for understanding and responding to various problematic features of Western liberalism.

Burns renews Strauss's relevance for us by showing that Strauss's work, contrary to many prevailing "Straussian" conceits, is built up deliberately around the theme or problem of technology. More specifically, Burns shows compellingly that the question of technology lies at the heart of Strauss's understanding of what is at stake in the difference between ancient and modern political philosophy. On Burns's reading, technology is, therefore, crucial both for understanding Strauss's appraisal of modernity—including the ostensible crisis or decline of liberalism—and for seeing clearly why it is that Strauss, and not other, more prominent critics of modernity like Nietzsche or Heidegger, is perhaps best suited to framing a practical response to certain problematic features of political liberalism and technological culture.

In what follows, I will re-state in summary form, and with my own emphasis, these three key features of Burns's book:

(a) How Burns pictures the problem of technology in Strauss's understanding of the history of philosophy, especially its place in differentiating ancient and modern positions, including, importantly, the moral differences that inform their respective stances.
(b) How Burns sees Strauss's sense of the contributions of technology to the problems afflicting Western liberalism.
(c) The core elements of Burns's articulation of Strauss's practical response to the main deficiencies of liberalism, especially those exacerbated by technology.

In my own view, social and political theorists in general, and Straussian thinkers in particular, have underplayed or even ignored problems related to technology and economy. This was perhaps less true during the Cold War, when there was pressure to reckon with Marx. But in the last sixty or so years, at a time, ironically, of sharp technological acceleration, there has been a dearth of the kind of high-quality, synoptic thinking that connects the problems of the age to the perennial problems of the tradition. Burns's book, along with other notable efforts, moves toward remediating this deficiency.[1]

I will say, however, that Burns's effort is, in some ways, still preliminary to a more complete encounter with the theme of technology and politics in ancient and modern thought. I don't mean this as a criticism. I mean only to point out objects for future consideration. It seems to me that a more thorough and critical assessment of the adequacy of Strauss's response to liberalism would require further and extensive reflection on the history and effects of industrial economy and technology, particularly those effects that were *not* clearly prepared for by modern thought, and those that have most impacted the conditions for liberal education.

PHILOSOPHICAL STAKES

> On the whole the view has prevailed that democracy must become rule by the educated, and this goal will be achieved by universal education. But universal education presupposes that the economy of scarcity has given way to an economy of plenty. And the economy of plenty presupposes the emancipation of technology from moral and political control. The essential difference between our view and the classical view consists, then, not in a difference regarding moral principle, not in a different understanding of justice: we, too, even our communistic coexistents, think that it is just to give equal things to equal people and unequal things to people of unequal merit. The difference between the classics and us with regard to democracy consists exclusively in a different estimate of the virtues of technology. But we are not entitled to say that the classical view has been refuted. Their implicit prophecy that the emancipation of technology, of the arts, from moral and political control would lead to disaster or to the dehumanization of man has not yet been refuted.
> —Leo Strauss, "What Is Political Philosophy?"[2]

[1] There are some exceptional treatments of the theme of technology in the Straussian literature. Two outstanding volumes are *Mastery of Nature*, eds. Svetozar Y. Minkov and Bernhardt L. Trout (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), and *Technology in the Western Political Tradition*, eds. Arthur M. Melzer, Jerry Weinberger, and M. Richard Zinman (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993).

[2] Leo Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy?* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1959), 37.

According to Burns, the view on technology that Strauss here attributes to the ancients pertains, not only to democracy, or more precisely, to the variance in the ancient and modern estimation of democracy, but—as the last lines of the quote suggest—to a core difference in the valuation of technology as such. For Burns, this quote captures both Strauss's insight into ancient moderation, including especially the ancient stance against innovation, while also conveying Strauss's own worries about the effects of the modern rejection of this stance. As Burns will argue, Strauss not only brought to light the underpinnings of what we might call "ancient technological conservativism," he also agreed with it, and took very seriously the possibilities of contemporary "disaster" and "dehumanization"—including the problems affecting the stability of liberalism—as sources of its vindication (see especially 2, 4, 13–14, 19, 21, 29).[3]

To better understand Burns's view on how the question of technology helps us to sharpen our sense of the difference Strauss points to above, we'll start by noting a fundamental agreement that Strauss claims is shared by both ancients and moderns.

For Strauss, it is the harshness and improvidence of nature that sets the primary features of the human situation. This is true for ancients and moderns alike (105, 128). Human survival, not to say human flourishing, depends decisively, therefore, on human resourcefulness, including especially our capacity for *techne* and other products and effects of practical reason. The ancients and the moderns agree, then, that technology is basic to the human condition; what we recognize as our "humanity" or "humanness" is ineluctably bound up with its emergence and unthinkable apart from its influence.

Despite this agreement, however, the ancients did not countenance, let alone pursue, a course of technologically oriented science. To the contrary, many of the ancients were happy to encourage preexisting forms of contempt for the practical arts. Moreover, authors like Plato and Aristotle went very far to obscure their understanding of our "beginnings," choosing instead to present nature as a sort of standard and even as a quasi-providential force. Nature for the classics is "teleological." Or to put it differently, what stands behind teleology is an unwillingness to picture nature as an enemy, a set of conditions that needs to be overcome or mastered. The ancients—including even the atomists and other non-Socratics—

[3] For Strauss on ancient technological conservatism, see *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, especially 290–99 (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1958).

put forward and would not relinquish the notion that man can live "naturally," or that humans can live well within limits, indeed, that there is a goodness *given* in external limitation, and that humans must acknowledge limit as a primary condition for living well, even or especially their mortal limits (2–3, 33).

For the ancients, then, there is a deep and revealing connection between "learning how to die" and learning how to live well. One of the premier features of such a life is that it seeks especially to access or to recover the goods that are available to it and that are genuinely "one's own." These goods are defined against other goods that are unnecessary or that require extensive external support. The life that seeks one's own good grows wary, therefore, of promises of future goods, especially those that appeal to hope and other false and compensatory forms of pleasure. Those few who live in the genuine awareness of death push hope to the margins of life, perhaps eliminating it altogether, or at least its most mendacious forms (96–98). This effect pertains to all promises of "good" in superlative or transcendent form, whether the source is religious belief or the optimistic projections of technological innovation.

Despite being fully aware of the harshness of our beginnings, the ancients are unwilling, therefore, to relinquish "natural goodness" precisely because this notion helps set the path toward seeing the idea of "nature" for what it is and for what it isn't. And it is the goodness of this path of learning that, for Strauss, perhaps most of all grounds the ancient insistence on moderation, and especially their unwillingness to support the project of technological science and industry. Although they are perfectly aware of the importance of technology to civilization and, in particular, the genuine goods that civilization affords, they do not believe that our humanity, or its most satisfying possibilities, consists in the activities of mastery, but rather in the fullness of "clarity," "awareness," "contemplation," or "*theoreia*." Mastery, however necessary, is not our most vital expression, and only produces effects and artifacts that are multivalent and, therefore, unstable in their utility. Even the grand artifice and workings of civilization are, for the ancients, variable in their effects; and if even the best regime is imperfect and vulnerable to decline, civilization cannot simply be "good in itself," let alone the product of some progressive historical trajectory (147; see also 127 and following). The awareness and understanding of beginnings is, for the ancients, correlative with the awareness and understanding of the meaning of cataclysm (8, 15, 40–44, 105, 122).

This is not to imply that the ancients were utterly detached or removed from political life. To the contrary. For Strauss, this awareness was compatible with wanting to help stabilize political life and to promote the possibilities it affords. Though we should add that the philosopher's motivation to act, or its psychological complexion, differs considerably from the motives of those non-philosophers who are most susceptible to his influence. There is enough connection between them, however, to enable the philosopher to promote certain moral virtues, especially moderation, while remaining consistent with his sense of human excellence, the grounds of the goodness of his way of life, and the dangers posed by expansive growth.

For their part, the moderns disagree generally with the ancient or classical response to the human situation. Yet in saying this, I'm being somewhat misleading. To be more precise, I should say that each of the modern political philosophers disagrees variously with his sense of the ancient or classical alternative. For as Burns makes clear, one of the key implications of Strauss's path-finding through esotericism is that we are fundamentally uncertain whether *any* of the moderns understood *any* of the ancients in the highest possible terms (96–97, 112–13, 132, 143, 147–49). Or as Devin Stauffer notes in a recent talk, we simply don't have access to the kind of literary encounter between ancients and moderns that would most clarify their sense of their own positioning on the disputed terrain.[4]

Now, the question of understanding across the tradition (or its absence), though it might seem disconnected from the problem of technology, is tied directly to the problem's illumination of the stakes of philosophical difference. As Burns shows us, not only is the degree of genuine engagement between moderns and ancients unclear, the moderns in fact urge us to question their understanding of the ancients in and through their literary strategies, including especially the aims of the so-called "enlightenment" and the technological science it promotes. Or to put the matter here in somewhat different terms: the moderns' approach to writing does not evince a grasp of or fully attempt to duplicate both Socrates's reasons for (a) turning away from natural science toward a study of the human things; and (b) the full rationale informing Socrates's approach to communication (questioning and refuting) and, subsequently, the Socratics' approach to writing, including particularly their unwillingness to

[4] See Stauffer's remarks on the "Ancients' Critique of the Moderns," Claremont Institute, American Political Science Association, December 18, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vmArgN0Bz8w.

emphasize human vulnerability. This is not to say that Strauss thought that somehow the moderns rejected esoteric writing. Far from it. All of the leading moderns practiced artful writing of some kind. The difference, however, shows up, not in the means, but in the ends of their literary projects. For the ancients, esoteric structure leads the reader into ever deeper encounters with their "cave of opinion," and, thus, always points to the salience of the philosophic life. For the moderns, by contrast, starting especially with Machiavelli, esotericism is a means of recruiting the reader into adopting a specific stance or posture, one defined primarily by antipathy toward the church and its legacy of classical appropriation. To the extent that modern authors seek to generate a conspiracy of subversion, they write much more openly about the harshness of nature, including human vulnerability to fortune and the need for artificial supports. And while there is in the moderns a resistance to providence that is similar to the ancients', especially in its focus on the primacy of the human good, the moderns place much more emphasis on political, economic, and technological innovation as the main sources of deliverance—not *theoreia*, but *praxis*, will, for them, enable true liberation and power. Modern esotericism, therefore, is more overt and frank about our material deprivation precisely because it seeks to cultivate support for a new approach to mastering the conditions of human life (4–11). And insofar as their writing is fixed to this "ideological" end and does not supply the kind of education necessary for a true reckoning with our "bad beginnings," the moderns produce some warrant for suspecting that they themselves have not undergone such an education or one that is sufficiently similar to provide the appropriate contrast to the ends of their enterprise.

This warrant is supported further by the fact that, according to Strauss, the ambitions of the modern effort range well beyond the unseating of Christian intellectual authority. The leading moderns wanted to found and develop a new kind of political reality, one that fused politics, science, and technology into the workings of a new civilizational substrate, something far more stable and prosperous than anything known to the archaic or classical worlds. Even if we grant, therefore, that the moderns had the highest motives and sought to recover the possibilities of philosophy from the ossified schools of Christendom, their practical objectives and especially the means by which they undertook their projects—including their modified esotericism or "propaganda" and the public subordination of theoretical science to practical or technological science—supply, in themselves, warrant enough to return to our

initial doubts as to the adequacy of their engagement with the ancients.[5] These doubts are further affirmed by Strauss's willingness to characterize the motives, not just of the targeted reader, but of the key philosophers themselves as reflecting "passion," "ire," and "disappointment in providence" (33–34n24).[6] We cannot trust, therefore, and even have some reason to distrust, that the moderns truly disagree with the ancients, especially with their deepest reasons for moderation and its concomitant "technological conservatism." For how can there be true disagreement if there isn't first genuine understanding? On Strauss's view, then, or at least this is what I take Burns to be emphasizing, the modern willingness to countenance technological mastery, both as a means and as an end, is itself a possible, if not likely, sign of a failure of understanding; in particular, a failure to re-constitute the Socratic education, especially in relation to moral psychology and the problem of hope (see especially 9, 91–102 with Chapter 5 as a whole). Consequently, modern technological politics, both implicitly and explicitly, *appeals to an unwarranted optimism*. Or to make a similar point, despite their greater openness about the harshness of life and greater urgency about the need for mastery, the moderns are unduly hopeful about the outcomes they seek, which correlates with their failure to provide a sober reckoning with the question and problem of nature, or at least one that matches the Socratic effort.

In guiding us via technology to Strauss's appraisal of these core differences between ancient and modern thought, Burns also helpfully shows that Strauss's view of the tradition, especially the modern turn, sets him apart from *all* other prominent critics of modernity. Most critics, even those who Strauss favors and who come close to his own views, tend to see modernity as either (a) a result of the secularization of Christianity (e.g., Tocqueville, Löwith, Voegelin), or (b) as an unfolding of ancient rationalism: Socratic rationalistic optimism, as in the case of Nietzsche; techne-based rationalism, as in the case of Heidegger. The failure to appreciate the full complexity of the modern or Machiavellian turn, including its literary dimensions, and, importantly, its conscious or unselfconscious discontinuity with the ancients correlates, for Strauss, with an underappreciation of the founding-character of the

[5] On this point see Burns's remarks in response to Stauffer, especially his helpful sketch of Machiavelli ("Reply to Devin Stauffer," *Interpretation* 48, iss. 3 (Summer 2022): 360–72); I recommend also Stauffer's very helpful review of Burns's book in the same issue (347–50). For more scholarly response to Burns, see the recent symposiums on his book published in *Review of Politics* 85, iss. 1 (Winter 2023) and *Perspectives on Political Science* 52, iss. 1 (2023), both of which contain helpful replies from Burns.

[6] Burns, "Reply to Devin Stauffer," 370.

first wave of modernity and the persistence of a residual hopefulness or optimism, especially in the capacity of the intellectual or the enlightenment to alter "culture" (49–51). Burns is particularly effective and clear on how this critique pertains to Heidegger; indeed, the contrast that Burns builds up between Strauss and Heidegger is one of the highlights of the book.

MODERN PROBLEMS

Strauss's assessment of the difference between ancient and modern thought includes his appraisal of modern politics, especially modern liberalism. As Burns shows, while Strauss was certainly a friend to liberalism, and was especially grateful to the American regime, he was, nonetheless, as a forward observer of the problems of liberalism, highly attuned to its deficiencies. Indeed, Strauss's ability to be of help to liberalism reflected the extent to which he did not share its perspective.

For Strauss, there are two related problems with liberalism that feature in Burns's discussion and that I want to emphasize. The first is the problem of runaway technological and economic growth; and the second is the failure of liberalism to govern itself in such a way that it remains admirable and viable to those who want politics to be serious and meaningful. There are several ways to connect these two problems, but the ligature that Burns features and that I want to highlight runs as follows.

Because much of the public justification for the goodness or "progressive" character of modern politics consists in the bounty of its technological yield, modern regimes tend to drift into a pattern of emancipatory freedom, which favors economic growth by increasing the scope of marketplace permissiveness and tolerance for innovation. The resulting regime type is what Strauss refers to generally as "mass democracy" (9) or "democratic mass society" (21). Mass democratic politics take their character, not so much from the institutions of popular governance, but from the levelling effects of mass culture: "mass culture is a culture which can be appropriated by the meanest capacities without any intellectual effort whatsoever and at a very low monetary price" (19–20).

Now, even though Strauss saw in liberalism certain possibilities for excellence or for a higher expression of enlightenment, he worried—like Nietzsche and Heidegger, among others—that mass democracy would lead ultimately to something like "dehumanization," "the

last man," or "the approach of the world night": "cultural" de-formation resulting from "the interplay of mass taste with high grade but strictly speaking unprincipled efficiency" (1–2, 4, 13–14, 69).

On the basis of this problem alone, Strauss seems close to concluding that the trade-offs entailed by liberalism stack up negatively, perhaps even decisively, against it. In order to make the civilizational shift, modern politics needed to open education and opportunity to the people; these moves were essential to its legitimacy or moral justification. But for Strauss, while liberalism was able to accomplish much in the way of material relief, comfort, and fairness, it couldn't provide these goods while maintaining enough of pre-liberal decency to stave off the coarsening effects of mass culture. When seen in connection with the second problem I mention above—the eclipse of excellence—the case against liberalism, for Strauss, tips even further toward being closed. As Burns points out, it would be one thing if modern liberalism actually made good on the promise to supply a sturdy civilizational substrate. But our reality is quite different. Not only do we now have to manage the social and environmental costs of technological innovation, many of which were unintentional and only emerge downstream from the marketplace, but the drift of all of this growth increasingly alienates precisely those types who might otherwise be the most serious and competent members of the political class. In shutting down, whether intentionally or not, the avenues of traditional seriousness and virtue, mass democracy smothers the possibilities for great and thoughtful action, undermining thereby the highest forms of participation and compensation available to those who would labor and sacrifice on its behalf. But in straining and failing to remain admirable, mass culture becomes increasingly and invariably contemptible; and when enough of the young and serious start to see the ideology and the gross materiality of technological yield as poisonous to their well-being, conditions ripen for spiritual revolt. Burns is especially compelling in showing how Strauss's "German Nihilism" fixes on this problem—liberalism's failure to sustain admirable politics—as a major deficiency, both in its own right and as a primary source of instability. As Burns also demonstrates, a full appreciation of this problem further supports the warrant, noted above, for doubting the adequacy of the moderns' putative engagement, let alone disagreement, with the ancients (35, 101, 112–13).

PRACTICAL RESPONSE AND CONCLUSION

While Burns presses effectively the relevance of Strauss's appraisal of the dangers endemic to liberalism and mass democracy, he is also emphatic that Strauss did not believe that these problems were necessarily fatal to all higher possibilities. This is especially true of political greatness, particularly the kind of magnanimous statesmanship epitomized in the life and work of Winston Churchill. Strauss praises Churchill in very high terms, even despite (or because of) his political failures. But the value of Churchill's example extends beyond the realm of action into his writings, particularly his history of Marlborough, which Strauss recommends as essential reading to all students of politics. Churchill's example and achievements, impressive perhaps at any time, are, for Strauss, exceedingly important for our time. For as Burns shows, Strauss thought that the living example of Churchill helps address directly the problem posed by serious but spiritually disaffected youth. Had the young Germans of the interwar period met a man like Churchill or met teachers who understood the possibility and meaning of Churchill, they might have been deterred from the excesses of revolutionary politics (73–83).

The place of Churchill in Strauss's response to liberalism helps, thus, to illustrate its general character: Strauss seeks to promote greatness and excellence, and the respect for both, but without also firing the impulse to revolution. And though he had serious reservations about how far his influence might go in achieving these effects, Strauss believed that, through teaching and through writing, the most helpful thing he could do was to cultivate an "aristocracy within democracy" that would—as a function of its own elevated awareness—recognize and pursue excellence without challenging directly the legitimacy of liberalism itself. To the extent that Strauss was successful or, more importantly, to the extent that he could see the first fruits of his effort, he could reassure himself that the downward drift of mass culture had not yet smothered all longing related to seriousness. Or to make a related point: Strauss not only proves that seriousness is still possible, he creates the space for the kinds of encounters that keep alive the pre-liberal or non-liberal alternatives. By challenging students and readers to confront the foundational problems, including the tensions endemic to the basic responses to the human situation, Strauss opens up a sympathetic engagement with the worlds of our premodern inheritance: the mythic, the classically political, the biblical, and the philosophic. It is in and through restoring and enlivening these possibilities,

and also the tensions between them, that Strauss most contributes to the cultivation of Western vitality. For it is precisely the same tensions driving Western dynamism that liberalism most threatens with technological eclipse.

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It is difficult for me to determine, finally, the extent to which Strauss and Burns are accurate in their description and analysis of "the modern project." This term conjures a sense of mutual understanding, shared intentionality, and concerted effort that gives me pause, especially in light of the challenges involved with understanding—as they understood themselves—any one of the leading moderns. With that said, I have seen for myself enough of what Strauss identifies as "mastery" or "technology" in the work of said moderns to be persuaded by what I understand of his reading of the modern turn. I don't think that Strauss's picture of modernity should be accepted on authority, but for those students who want to work at seeing it for themselves, Burns is an extremely helpful guide. Without question, Burns's book is one of the best books on Strauss that I have read.

I am somewhat wary, however, of Burns's recapitulation of Strauss's understanding of the anti-religious or anti-theological dimension of the modern project, especially the strong, "eliminativist" version Burns puts forward here and elsewhere. I don't mean to dispute that, starting with Machiavelli, there was a united effort of some kind to modify or neutralize European Christianity. But Burns sometimes seems to claim more than this, that the moderns wanted a completely godless world (52, 56–57, 161).[7] And while I see Burns's (and Strauss's) reasons for subordinating the claims of the moderate enlightenment to its radical form, I don't think that this articulation of motive is always helpful in recovering the theological dimensions of modern thought, nor am I persuaded that it is sufficient as a summary of the essence of Strauss's views on the matter. I want to add also, that, in the case of Francis Bacon, one of the most important moderns, especially regarding technological science, I do not think it is sufficient to claim that Bacon intends simply to subordinate theoretical science to applied or technological science. This formulation fails to capture fully

[7] See, for instance, Burns, "Bacon's New Atlantis and the Goals of Modernity," in *Socrates and Dionysius: Philosophy and Art in Dialogue*, ed. Ann Ward (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), particularly 74–78.

Bacon's philosophical ambition and, more specifically, how Bacon himself pictures the kind of theoretical advances he thinks, rightly or wrongly, experimental science will enable, especially in contrast with Aristotelianism, which limits itself to the manifest genera or kinds.[8]

As regards Burns's restatement of Strauss's practical response to liberalism, I can't help but wonder whether Strauss's approach needs to be modified or updated in light of certain social and technological changes that have occurred in the last fifty or so years. To be more specific, I wonder whether our increasing reliance and unthinking dependence on various technologies, together with the normalization of certain, once radical, emancipatory freedoms, has so intensified mass-mindedness that any encounter with "great books" or "liberal education" is likely to founder on the shoals of unseriousness.

Now, on the one hand, I can appreciate that Strauss's strategy, at its core, must remain the same to achieve the desired results in awareness. Either students have a moving encounter with the fundamental questions or they don't. But part of what motivates my concern is a problem that Burns points to but does not really address: insofar as Strauss believes that the seriousness necessary for aristocratic education includes sympathetic engagement with nobility and greatness on the one hand, and, in addition, the Socratic critique of the same, on the other, it seems possible, if not likely, that the power of the Socratic critique might preempt or distort the kind of encounter Strauss intends. This risk, it seems to me, is even likelier in our context because of the way that technological dependence reinforces the ambient individualism of liberalism. Or let me put it this way: there is a rhyming echo between liberal individualism and the Socratic concern with one's good; and because the former colors the moral context of education today, it is increasingly difficult to stage the kind of tension that would make meaningful Socrates's dialectical engagement with moral virtue. More needs to be done to sharpen the bite of this sort of encounter, lest the student simply fold their "education" into one of many curated "experiences" or "identities." Now more than ever, technology encourages *and protects* precisely the conditions for unseriousness Socrates describes in book 8 of *Republic*, where democratic drift leads to and justifies lives of random superficiality. Unless, or so it seems to me, technology itself—or contemporary technological society, including its assumptions and

[8] For those interested in learning more about Bacon's philosophical ambition, I commend highly Tobin Craig's recent talk: "The Philosophic Ambition of a Technological Science" (youtube.com/watch?v=HS8OCkO8XOM).

its habits—is challenged, in addition to the cogency of prevailing liberal norms, liberal education will increasingly turn out "great books aesthetes" and "socratized liberals" instead of helping to shape a genuine elite. But even this may have little effect; many students today have the sense that liberalism so thoroughly suffuses our culture, that, even if they see into its problems, it is hard for them to be fully open to the critique because they cannot conceptualize a way of life that can be meaningfully informed by some non-liberal alternative. At this point, one wonders whether, or to what extent, liberal education itself needs to incorporate a serious encounter with the *contemporary* alternatives to liberalism. Not to inspire revolutionary hopes, but to clarify the landscape of possibility, especially for those who see increasingly little room for political or institutional action, let alone greatness, and want to at least consider whether alternative forms of life, work, education, and community building might make more sense. Considerations of precisely this kind are, I think, more pressing than ever if liberal education is going to help produce some part of the political class that is clear enough to itself about the problems of technology and liberalism to manage effectively the trade-offs entailed by technological governance.[9]

[9] My thanks to Andrea Kowalchuk, James Guest, Travis Hadley, Shilo Brooks, Jason Lund, and Alex Priou for helpful discussion, suggestions, and critical feedback.