# The Social Institutions Viewed Through the Contrasting Philosophies of Plato and Aristotle

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# Preface

There are a lot of folks in academia that want to sweep "dead white males" under the historical carpet, but two dead white men we cannot ignore are Plato and Aristotle. For better or worse, these men have been at the heart of Western culture for more than two millennia, and still continue to shape it. There is no social or political thought that we think today that was not thought in the minds of these two great philosophers. They had a lot to say about the family, religion, education, economy, law, and government—the six primary institutions of society. However, they had contrasting visions on most things pertaining to the social institutions that may be broadly viewed as liberal and conservative, or what Thomas Sowell calls unconstrained and constrained visionaries, respectively. Plato and Aristotle were men of very different temperaments and thus very different philosophies. These philosophies have been so influential, albeit, so different, that many scholars have stated that the ideas promoted by them represent nothing less than a struggle for the soul of Western civilization. Plato was a creative idealist of the *should be* and is the intellectual father of collectivism/statism whose modern avatars are communism or socialism. Aristotle was a philosophical realist of the empirical is who knew that although humans are social animals, their assimilation into the state could go only so far. Plato has been often described as the philosophical father of those who dream, and Aristotle as the philosophical father of those who know. It has been said that their respective philosophies cannot be reconciled, but they have led to a dynamic creative tension that has moved Western civilization forward (Herman, 2014).

Philosophy is the mother of all formal systems of knowledge. It is emphasized that there cannot be a philosophy-free science and that philosophy has proved useful to many great physicists such as Albert Einstein. It is thus doubtless useful for grounding the less advanced social sciences. It provides the foundational principles of knowledge—ontology, epistemology, logic, and so forth, and brings unity to all the sciences. As is the case with all domains of inquiry, the philosophy of social science seeks to lay bare the practices and assumptions underlying its inquiries and offers critiques with the ultimate aim of enhancing a discipline's ability to improve its understanding of the phenomena it claims as its domain. Philosophy asks social scientists to contemplate the abstractions and concepts they work with, which are usually, consciously or otherwise, taken for granted as representing the truth of the matter. But if such eminently reasonable men as Plato and Aristotle could look at the exact same facts and interpret them so differently, so can we lesser minds.

The second chapter addresses the issue of human nature and how social institutions—as means of meeting human needs—are tied to it. A big issue among Sowell's constrained and unconstrained visionaries is whether a universal human nature exists. Both Plato and Aristotle believed that it does, but ever since Darwin, biologists have considered it one with fuzzy boundaries. Of course, if there is no universal human nature underlying cultural variation, then the stories from ancient and distant cultures would mystify us, but they do not. If human beings in all cultures at all times did not have the same hopes, aspirations, character traits, emotions, feelings, goals, needs, moral strengths, and weaknesses—if culture was just an

arbitrary selection from a grab-bag of possibilities—it would be difficult to grasp the wisdom bequeathed to us by the minds of the past. Who does not understand Plato's brilliant allegories describing facets of human nature writing almost two-and-one half millennia ago?

The human genome is the chemical archive of millions of years of evolutionary wisdom accumulated by natural selection. Natural selection is a trial-and-error process that changes a population's gene pool over time by the selective retention and elimination of genes as they became adaptive or maladaptive in their environments. The functional genes that are part of the human genome today are there because they provided some sort of advantage to our ancestors in the pursuit of the shared goals of all life forms: survival and reproduction. Thus, from an evolutionary point of view, human nature may be defined as the collection of adaptations contained in the human genome, and part of that genome is dedicated to meeting human needs in social institutions. I examine evolutionary models of the development of the powerful notion of egalitarianism.

Following the introductory chapters, each primary social institution is examined through the contrasting philosophies of Plato and Aristotle or with Thomas Sowell's unconstrained or constrained visions. These contrasting philosophies/visions are illustrated by examples of issues of current importance.

The Family: The family is the basic institution of any society. How important is the traditional family? Aristotelians see it as the carrier of traditional culture, and therefore it is of great

importance. Platonists also view it as the carrier of traditional culture, but because they would like a very different culture, they see the family standing in its way. Many of his modern temperamental counterparts also favor alternate family forms because they see them as more egalitarian. The value of something is best gauged by its absence. In this spirit, I look at the consequences of family disruption in modern society. I then look at the evolutionary view of the family and the biological mechanisms of mother-infant and male-female bonding.

Religion: Are Western (Christian) religions important for a free and flourishing society, or are they a hindrance as the "New Atheists" maintain? Those of a Platonic temperament, such as Marx and his modern followers, view religion as they view the family; an institution standing in the way of radical social change and would like to see its influence curtailed or eliminated. Those of an Aristotelian temperament view it as an important binding influence and an independent institutional bulwark standing between the individual and the state, thus preventing an all-powerful government.

Education: Both Plato and Aristotle saw the function of education is to provide moral character building and to produce knowledgeable workers and administrators for the polis. We look at how the modern educational system is doing with regard to these functions and conclude that it is not doing well with respect to either goal. The major changes in this institution from colonial times to the present are examined to look at possible reasons for this. The chapter also looks at the current system of higher education in terms of claims that it

is a monocultural Platonist institution lacking in intellectual diversity and tolerance for opposing views, particularly in the humanities and social sciences.

The Economy: Economic issues were subordinate to the central themes of Plato and Aristotle's thought—justice, virtue, character, and the Good. Economic questions were engaged only in terms of evaluating how they could serve these higher ends. The big issue here is the battle between an Aristotle-like free market versus a Plato-like command economy. I look at the evolutionary origins of the egalitarian instinct and how it tamed somewhat the drive to seek status and the natural inclination to nepotism. Do we favor policies derived from deontological ethics regardless of the outcome, or do we favor policies derived from consequentialist ethics made from the principle of self-interest, and what is the principle of distributive justice?

Law: Is law only the commands of the state—positivist law—or is there a higher form—natural law? This issue is framed as Plato's preference for the rule of men (his philosopher kings) versus Aristotle's preference for constitutionalism and the rule of law, and of negative versus positive rights. The United States Constitution is a natural law document of negative rights; that is, government non-interference with inalienable rights. Platonists see this as retarding progress and want the Constitution to be interpreted contemporaneously rather than historically so that the state can provide a range of positive rights. Aristotelians want the opposite and view the provision of an excess of positive rights as beyond the purview of government because in doing so it must necessarily infringe on the negative rights of others.

Government: The big issue here is the tension between the demands of equality and the demands of freedom. Must we sacrifice one to the demands of the other, or are they reconcilable? Both Plato and Aristotle had jaundiced views of democracy, although Aristotle's disquiet was only with a direct, or "excessive" democracy that led to claims of economic, as well as civic, and social equality. America's founding fathers were Aristotelians in this regard and opted for a republic with indirect democracy. Plato's idealism led him to think that the individual could be completely assimilable into the state, while Aristotle's realism saw this as both undesirable and unattainable. While believing the state to be superior to the individual, Aristotle left ample room for individual autonomy. The equality/freedom issue is illustrated in the current debate about same-sex marriage and religious liberty. How far can the state go in demanding orthodoxy from all its citizens?

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# Chapter One
# Philosophy and Temperament

## The Value of Philosophy for Social Science

Philosophy is the stern but loving mother of all formal systems of knowledge. Because the subject matter she claims for herself is the whole of knowledge, she fusses around at the periphery of all disciplines, sometimes clapping, sometimes scolding, but always encouraging. As Nweke and Uyanwune (2020, p. 785) note: "Philosophy permeates in virtually all the disciplines because philosophy deals with fundamental knowledge and it involves intellectual activity and as such uses its philosophical apparatus to investigate the origin, source, and validity of the self-acclaimed disciplines. Basically, philosophy as a discipline asks questions about everything that there is to ask." The early Greek philosophers thought of philosophy as a practical endeavor and "believed that philosophy discloses the truths by which one should orientate one's life" (Strickland, 2013, p. 1080). We orientate our lives within social institutions, so thinking philosophically about them goes beyond a mere intellectual exercise.

Many issues central to the social institutions are perennial and we can be sure that philosophers have addressed them down the ages. They explored such things as the proper functioning of the institutions and how they should be arranged, and have asked questions such as if communal ownership is better than private ownership; if this family form is better than some other,

or if religion helps or hinders social cohesion. Philosophers unavoidably begin their examination with premises they assume to be true, but whether or not a premise is accepted as a "truth" depends a great deal on whether one is a Platonic idealist or an Aristotelian realist. Outside the hard sciences, "truth" is a property of beliefs and assertions made by these two broad categories of thought that are widely considered liberal/progressive or conservative, respectively (Herman, 2014). Even in the hard sciences we run into the problem of Kuhn's (1970) notion of the theory laden-ness of data; that is, the idea that theoretical beliefs and value expectations play a role in determining scientific observations. This is particularly problematic in the social sciences where one's worldview often determines what we look at, where we look, and how data are interpreted. We rarely begin with radical Cartesian doubt and see where that takes us. Rather, we tend to identify a particular position we find congenial and then construct a defense of it.

Philosophers pondered many of the same questions that the modern sciences do long before those questions were parceled out to different disciplines, relying only on their rational faculties unaided by any of the accouterments that bless modern science such as computers, microscopes, and telescopes. Philosophy's domain is not shrinking as the sciences advance because it continues to have a valuable role to play in knowledge synthesis and holding before us the continuity of thought bequeathed to us by the great minds of the past. Philosophy thus continues to monitor her offspring in childhood and adolescence, making sure that in their haste

to grow up they do not lose contact with the foundational principles of knowledge. Whether we know it or not, there cannot be a philosophy-free science.

Social scientists and philosophers work with different goals and are judged by different standards. Social scientists are judged by the explanatory power of their findings and the clarity of their presentations applied to specific problems. Philosophers are judged by their persuasive use of logic and language in articulating the intellectual framework within which these specific problems reside. For instance, criminologists may rest content with showing that a particular approach to punishing offenders "works" better than some alternative approach in terms of the goals they have in mind (rehabilitation, deterrence, etc.), or arguing whether this or that practice is consistent with justice as they view it. The philosopher's motives are more fundamental, dealing with core concepts, presuppositions, ultimate moral principles, and categories of being and knowledge rather than generalized facts. They will ask why we punish, what is the evolutionary basis for it, do we justify it on consequentialist or deontological grounds, where society would be without it, what its relationship is to justice, where intuitions of justice come from, and what it means to act justly, and many other questions.

Philosopher and mathematician Bertrand Russell wrote of the value of philosophy: "The knowledge it aims at is the kind of knowledge which gives unity and system to the body of the sciences, and the kind which results from a critical examination of our convictions, prejudices, and beliefs" (1988, p. 18).

Philosophy concerns itself with examining the assumptions, methods, and ethics that apply to particular sciences, and to issues central to all sciences, such as the nature of truth and reality. It is an enterprise based on deductive logic rather than an enterprise based on inductive empiricism. As is the case with any other domain of inquiry, the philosophy of social science seeks to lay bare the practices and assumptions underlying the inquiries the discipline makes and offers critiques with the ultimate aim of enhancing a discipline's ability to improve its understanding of the phenomena it claims as its domain. It thus asks social scientists to contemplate the concepts they work with, which are usually, consciously or otherwise, taken for granted as representing the truth of the matter.

Social science is in the toddler stage relative to its more mature siblings in the hard sciences. But even in these disciplines, many important questions are philosophical, such as the nature of their concepts and their interrelationships. Many of the finest minds in physics, the pinnacle of what it means to be scientific, such as Niels Bohr, Erwin Schrodinger, and Ernst Mach, were steeped in philosophy, and "Einstein's philosophical habit of mind, cultivated by undergraduate training and lifelong dialogue, had a profound effect on the way he did physics" (Howard, 2005, p. 34). Howard notes that Einstein often referenced the works of Kant, Hume, and Spinoza in his writings, and believed that all scientists should cultivate a philosophical frame of mind or rest content to be outhouse counters unable to see the forest for the trees: "So many people today—and even professional scientists—seem to me like somebody who has seen thousands of trees but has never seen a forest." He added that philosophical

insight is "the mark of distinction between a mere artisan or specialist and a real seeker after truth" (in Howard, 2005, p. 34). The former does Kuhnian "normal science," the later does revolutionary science.

Not far behind Einstein in the pantheon of great minds is Nobel laureate Niels Bohr, of whom Galison (2008, p. 122) writes: "historians of physics have made much of the way Niels Bohr used the ideas, directly and indirectly, of Soren Kierkegaard as he formulated his principle of complementarity." Werner Heisenberg, a pioneer in quantum physics, lectured extensively on Immanuel Kant's ontology and epistemology, especially in terms of interpreting quantum phenomena (Camilleri, 2005). And Kurt Godel, arguably the greatest mathematical logician of the 20th century, was deeply devoted to philosophy, especially the works of Leibniz, Kant, and Husserl (Parsons, 2010). If philosophy has found use among physicists for interpreting the weird world of quantum mechanics with its concepts of superposition, quantum entanglement, and wave collapse, use can be found for it when trying to understand issues involving the social institutions.

We in the social sciences may benefit more than physical and natural scientists since our disciplines are young, and rarely question the underlying assumptions and conceptual underpinnings upon which our work rests. Philosophy will clarify our thoughts, inform us of why we think about things the way we do, solve some contradictions in our thinking we never knew existed, and perhaps even dissolve some dichotomies we thought were cast in stone. It helps us to analyze concepts,

definitions, and arguments, and to organize ideas, and to extract what is essential from excessive quantities of information. It also aids us to distinguish subtle differences between opposing views, find common ground between them, and perhaps even synthesize them. Let us be clear: "The alternative to philosophy is not no philosophy, but bad philosophy. The 'unphilosophical' person has an unconscious philosophy, which they apply in their practice—whether of science or politics or daily life" (Collier, 1994, p. 17). These "unconscious philosophies" seep into the work of social scientists guided by their worldviews, because the foundation of these worldviews lies in temperamental dispositions.

## Platonist or Aristotelian?

Philosophy is thought of as the quintessential method of rational reasoning. It never occurs to many of us that one's temperament affects how we go about philosophizing or conducting scientific research because temperament is about emotion rather than rationality. But different temperaments serve to make different worldviews emotionally more attractive to us than others. William James (1988, p. 488-489) noted that the strong grip of temperament inevitably intrudes into the work of philosophers and that the grip is stronger than that of reason:

> Of whatever temperament a professional philosopher is, he tries when philosophizing to sink the fact of his temperament. Temperament is no conventionally recognized reason, so he urges impersonal reasons only for his conclusions. Yet his temperament really

> gives him a stronger bias than any of his more strictly objective premises. It loads the evidence for him one way or the other, making for a more sentimental or a more hard-hearted view of the universe, just as this fact or that principle would.

How temperamental dispositions affect our worldviews has long been explored by scholars from a variety of disciplines using the two founding giants of Western philosophy—Plato and Aristotle—as exemplars. A fresco in the Vatican's Apostolic Palace known as *The School of Athens*, painted by Raphael, features Plato and Aristotle, his star pupil and strongest critic, as the central figures surrounded by a number of other philosophers of lesser stature. These two men represent the archetypes of the two very different intellectual lenses through which to examine the primary social institutions. In the fresco, Plato is depicted as gesturing with a finger pointed toward the heavens, and Aristotle as grounding his master by gesturing toward the earth with a downward palm. These gestures symbolize the central aspects of their respective temperaments guiding their philosophies; Plato the dreamer of the ought, and Aristotle the pragmatist of the is. Eighteenth-century English poet and philosopher, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, believed that all humans are temperamentally destined to follow the path of one or the other of these two great pillars of Western thought: "Every man is born an Aristotelian or a Platonist. I do not think it possible that anyone born an Aristotelian can become a Platonist; and I am sure that no born Platonist can ever change into an Aristotelian. They are two classes of man, beside which it is next to impossible to conceive a third. The

one considers reason a quality or attribute; the other considers it a power" (Porteous, 1934, p. 97).

Plato had the temperament of a poet who idealized mathematics as the only real path to knowledge. He considered reason to be constitutive; that is, a power that can constitute existence—create new forms of reality. Knowledge is made in the mind and transcends the world of the senses because the senses lead us astray. Plato did not deny the reality of the phenomenal world, but he claimed that the objects we perceive are mere shadows mimicking the ultimate, which consisted of eternal and immutable "ideas" or "Forms" that transcended space and time and exist in a place beyond the heavens. While all things that exist and are experienced in the phenomenal world participate in the Forms (how could we judge a person or an object beautiful, or an act as unjust, if we did not have an archetypal idea of beauty and justice?), they are ever-changing and imperfect copies of their perfect and unchanging Forms. The Forms remind us that everything we encounter or theorize is defective when measured against them. Plato believed it better to think philosophically about the world than to observe and measure it, and he found refuge from the distasteful actualities of the politics of his world in utopianism.

Aristotle was an empiricist who considered reason to be a quality of the mind and regulative; that is, reason regulates or orders an existing reality with constitutive rules. "While Plato poured scorns on the world of sense and deprecated sense-experience as the source and basis of the knowledge of reality, Aristotle loved facts and was deeply interested

in collecting and examining them" (Bhartiya, 2019, p. 813). Rather than imagining utopian perfection as Plato envisioned in his *Republic*, Aristotle counseled tinkering with deficiencies in existing society. He saw the state and its institutions as springing naturally and spontaneously from the human needs for sustenance, cooperation, friendship, and stability, and not as something dreamt up strolling in the garden. In Aristotle's state, each individual decides his or her own function based on the talents and ambitions they possess, and not assigned some function according to the demands of Plato's philosopher kings. As Grube (1947, p. 16) notes: "Aristotle is more ready to see some truth in the opinions of ordinary people (he often starts a discussion by considering them) whereas Plato, especially in his earlier works, has nothing but contempt for 'the many.'"

Porteous's analysis of the works of Plato and Aristotle led him to view emotion as the primary guide of Platonists, and dispassionate analysis as the primary guide of Aristotelians. He describes Plato's thought as "challenging and revolutionary" bringing to the table an "emotional quality" lacking in "Aristotle's dispassionate analysis…Aristotle is the master of those who know, as Plato is of those who dream" (1934, p. 105). Porteous further noted that it is the reliance on the lessons of experience that prevents conservatives from appreciating liberal/progressive abstract ideals. Nobel laureate physicist Werner Heisenberg agrees with Porteous's analysis, noting: "Aristotle, as an empiricist, was critical of the Pythagoreans [among whom we place Plato], who "are not seeking for theories and causes to account for observed facts, but rather

forcing their observations and trying to accommodate them to certain theories and opinions of their own" (in Wilber, 2001, p. 60).

## Idealism and Realism

Everything in Plato is about the ideal (the ideal person, the ideal city, and so on), and to achieve the ideal we must start fresh and abolish the family and private property as things that make people embrace nepotism and selfishness. For Aristotle, nepotism and selfishness are facts of human nature, and any state must accommodate them. Dictionaries describe idealism and realism as antonyms, but every successful person is both an idealist and a realist; idealism inspires and realism works. Herman (2014, p. 412) had this notion in mind when he wrote about the battle between Platonism and Aristotelianism: "The creative drive of Western civilization had arisen not from a reconciliation of the two halves but from a constant alert tension between them." Idealism in our individual lives ("I think I can do this.") can make the world a pleasanter place for us if we yoke it to a firm grasp of reality, but if we spend our lives as dreamers of what could be without ever engaging reality, we accomplish nothing.

The American founding fathers were both idealists and realists in their vision of "a more perfect union." James Madison wrote: "Our Country, if it does justice to itself, will be the workshop of liberty to the Civilized World, and do more than any other for the uncivilized" (Brands, 1998, p. 5). This is idealistic, but the founder's vision was based on an understanding of the historical

experience of the achievable, not on abstract theory. The French and Russian revolutions were undergirded by the Platonic notion of sweeping away everything about the old regimes and starting afresh in the spirit of "If it's cracked, throw it away." They were both collectivist revolutions of popular sovereignty; the one influenced by Rousseau's General Will, and the other by Marx's dictatorship of the proletariat.

By way of contrast, the American Revolution was quite a legal affair in the Aristotelian spirit of "If it's cracked, fix it." Many revolutionaries took the position that the separation from Britain was a legal separation and that the Declaration of Independence was a political bill of divorce based on legal grounds found in the English Constitution: "The American Revolution was a reluctant uprising staged by men who were exceptionally dedicated to the English constitution" (Johnson, 2006, p. 3). The philosophical underpinning of the American revolution was the pragmatic liberty and individualism of John Lock, and it did not engage in the wholesale destruction of the old order. No dictatorship arose out of the American Revolution. Platonists may say that this was because the founding fathers were philosopher kings, but to Aristotelians it was the result of human reasoning tethered to historical experience.

Most of us are idealists in our youth but became realists with age. If we do not temper idealism with a healthy dose of realism, we tend to become alienated. In Walter Kaufmann's analysis of alienation, he sees Plato's utopianism as springing from a deep sense of estrangement from his society: "Plato may be considered a paradigm of alienation. *His Republic* is the work

of a man estranged from his society and from the politics and morals of his time" (1980, p. 34). Likewise, Leger Wood views Plato as an alienated introvert and Aristotle as an extrovert who was adjusted to his social environment, and how these traits were reflected in their respective philosophies:

> Realistic, naturalistic, and materialistic systems of philosophy are not infrequently the product of an extroverted personality; whereas idealism is ordinarily associated with the sensitive, introverted type. …The realistic theory of an independent, external world is nothing but the philosophical articulation of the ordinary man's belief in physical objects. The idealistic or mentalistic position is likewise the translation into theoretical language of the introvert's disparagement of the external order and his consequent absorption in his own inner life" (Wood, 1937, pp. 481- 482).

None of this is meant to disparage Plato's monumental intellect, or to claim a higher one for Aristotle. Plato was indubitably the master. No one has grasped human nature better than he. The allegory of the cave exhorts us to question every assumption about what we call "real;" the Ring of Gyges tells us a lot about justice and human behavior in the absence of systems of social control, and not even Freud explained the hedonic tug-o'-war people play with themselves, or the tripartite nature of the human psyche, better than Plato did in his myth of the charioteer. Nor do I claim a superior character for Aristotle. Both he and Plato were men of their times, and today both would be seen as racist, sexist, and defenders of slavery. Plato and Aristotle

are compared here as the archetypal representative of the two primary currents of thought in modern social science. The city-states (Athens, Sparta, etc.) with which Plato and Aristotle were most conversant, were small and relatively cohesive units, in which political, religious, and cultural norms were interlinked, and were thus more akin to Durkheim's mechanical solidarity than modern societies characterized by organic solidarity. Nevertheless, the social, political, religious, and economic issues addressed by these men are timeless (as are their respective personality types), and thus relevant today.

## Temperament and Visions

Similar to Coleridge, economist-philosopher Thomas Sowell (1987) posits that two contrasting visions of the world have shaped human thought about the same things throughout recorded history—the constrained and unconstrained visions. The constrained vision, which is broadly conservative, views human activities as constrained by a self-centered and largely unalterable human nature. The unconstrained vision, which is broadly liberal/progressive, views human nature as formed anew by culture, and posits that it is perfectible. With Aristotle, constrained visionaries say: "This is how the world is," and with Plato unconstrained visionaries say: "This is how the world *should be*." Sowell often uses the terms "gut level" and "instinct" to describe how visions intrude into human thinking: "It is what we sense or feel before we have constructed any systematic reasoning that could be called a theory, much less deduced any specific consequences as hypotheses to be tested against evidence" (1987, p. 14). The contrasting visions are brought to

life in one sentence: "While believers in the unconstrained vision seek the special causes of war, poverty, and crime, believers in the constrained vision seek the special causes of peace, wealth, or a law-abiding society" (Sowell, 1987, p. 31). This implies that unconstrained visionaries believe that war, poverty, and crime are aberrations of human nature to be explained, while constrained visionaries see these things as arising from human nature and historically normal, albeit regrettable, and believe that what has to be explained is how to prevent them.

Unconstrained visionaries are, like Plato, idealistic supporters of radical change and dreamers of the maybe and favor thought experiments over experience. Constrained visionaries are, like Aristotle, at peace with the status quo, are wary of the failed utopias of the past, and favor social experience over social experiments. The optimism of the unconstrained leads them to focus on society as the source of problems such as crime and poverty. The pessimism of constrained visionaries leads them to locate the source of such problems in the individuals affected by them. Constrained and unconstrained visionaries will thus have different policy recommendations for dealing with those problems that are fair and just to all. Both value fairness and justice in dealing with social problems, but fairness and justice are concepts saturated with contradictory notions; we all praise them but differ as to when their promise is fulfilled.

With so many fundamental differences between Platonists and Aristotelians (or visions), the prospect of peace between them faces formidable barriers. They are formidable because

they are more temperament-driven than rational because our temperaments have a way of dictating what information we deem worthy of our attention before we ponder it intellectually (Jost, Federico, & Napier, 2009). Temperament consists of a number of sub-traits such as *mood* (happy/sad), *sociability* (introverted/extraverted), *reactivity* (calm/excitable), *activity level* (high/low), and affect (warm/cold), all of which have heritability coefficients ranging from 0.40 to the 0.60s (Bouchard et al., 2003). Many studies have found the heritability of liberalism-conservatism—which map closely to Platonism and Aristotelianism and to unconstrained-constrained visions—between 0.40 and the mid-0.50s (Dawes & Weinschenk, 2020; Wajzer & Dragan, 2021). Neuroscientists are also finding that political orientations are correlated with variant brain structures (Jost & Amadio, 2011; Kim et al., 2020).

Talk of genetic bases for such things as political attitudes sits uneasily with social scientists, who believe that we get our politics with our porridge, at the kitchen table. Of course, geneticists do not expect to find genes "for" an Aristotelian or Platonic worldview or a Sowellian vision by rummaging around among our chromosomes, nor do neuroscientists expect to see red and blue clusters of neurons embedded in our brains. Rather, our worldviews are synthesized genetically via our temperaments that serve as physiological substrates that shape our environmental experiences in ways that increase the likelihood of developing traits and attitudes that color our world in hues most congenial to our natures (Olson, Vernon, & Harris, 2001; Smith et al., 2011). Geneticists call this shaping of experience by our gene-driven temperaments

gene-environment interaction (GxE) and evocative and active gene-environment correlation (rGE).

If genes account for between 40 to 60 percent of the variance in temperamental sub-traits, the environment accounts for the remaining variance. Thus, while our visions are resistant to change, they are not impossible to change. The notion of variance alerts us to the possibility that the Platonic/Aristotelian, constrained/unconstrained dimensions are continua along which people may shift back and forth according to the issue at hand; not rigid dichotomies. But we do see the same people consistently lining up on opposite sides of the barricades on multiple issues of sociopolitical importance. Peterson, Smith, and Hibbing (2020, p. 600) find that political attitudes are quite stable across time, but "on those occasions when political attitudes do shift across the life span, liberals are more likely to become conservatives than conservatives are to become liberals." Nevertheless, temperament, and the personality that it helps to mold, are quite stable from childhood onwards, and it is an incontrovertible fact that it, more than reason, frames our worldviews. If it did not, we would not see such eminently *reasonable* thinkers as Plato and Aristotle and their modern counterparts differing so widely on important issues concerning the social institutions.

Scientists have long told us that our vaunted rationality plays handmaiden to our emotions: "Neuroscientific studies have proven that most decision-making is based primarily on emotional and not rational processing of information" (Alsharif, Salleh, & Baharun, 2021, p. 72). The Enlightenment

philosopher David Hume insisted that emotions drive our behavior more than rationality, and considered our species to be more accurately named Homo emovere ("emoting man") than *Homo sapiens*. It was Hume's position that: "we perceive a situation, experience emotions, pass judgment on the situation based on the emotion it evokes, and only then do we attempt to provide post hoc rational reasons for that judgment" (Walsh, 2014, p.216).

Emotions are subjective feelings prompted by limbic system arousal in response to some perceived event. Evolutionary biologists inform us that the limbic system predates the evolution of the brain structures associated with rationality (the prefrontal lobes) by at least a million years (Suwa et al, 2009). Sociologist Douglas Massey (2002, p. 15) notes that: "Emotionality clearly preceded rationality in evolutionary sequence, and as rationality developed it did not replace emotionality as the basis for human interaction. Rather, rational abilities were gradually added to preexisting and simultaneously developing emotional capacities." Psychologist Jonathan Haidt (2001, p. 819) put it more forcefully: "It [emotion] comes first in phylogeny, it emerges first in ontogeny, it is triggered more quickly in real-time judgments, and it is more powerful and irrevocable [than rationality] when the two systems yield conflicting judgments." Brain imaging research has shown that emotion and cognition are fully *physically* integrated in the lateral prefrontal cortex (LPFC). The LPFC weighs cognitive/affective motivational input from their respective brain areas to guide human action (Etkin, Egner, & Kalisch, 2011), but when reason and emotion are conflicted, the latter typically triumphs.

## Worldviews and the Locus of Control

Another lens through which we can gauge a person's ideological stance on important social issues is their locus of control. The locus of control construct refers to the degree to which individuals believe they have control over their lives as opposed to believing that external forces have more control over their lives. Conservatives tend to attribute the locus of control to dispositional factors such as conscientiousness and self-control. Liberals tend to attribute the locus of control to external factors such as sociocultural forces. These positions are revealed in a nationwide poll that found that strong liberals say the top reasons for people's level of wealth are external: family connections (48%), inheritance (40%), and getting lucky (31%). Strong conservatives say the top reasons are internal: hard work (62%), ambition (47%), and self-discipline (45%). Strong liberals say the top causes of poverty are discrimination (51%), an unfair economic system (48%), and lack of educational opportunities (48%), while strong conservatives say that the problems are poor life choices (60%), lack of work ethic (52%), breakdown of families (47%), and drugs and alcohol (47%) (Ekins, 2019).

These attributions reflect differing general views of the internal/external contributions to wealth and poverty that are not always applicable. Both liberals and conservatives are aware that economic outcomes reflect a complicated mixture of both internal dispositions and external circumstances. Even the most self-controlled and conscientious person may sink into poverty due to external circumstances, such as a recession and job loss, or a devastating illness, and some who lack self-control and

conscientiousness are wealthy because of family connections or luck. Likewise, some people are doubtless poor despite the opportunities they may have had because they lack self-control and conscientiousness. The divide between liberals and conservatives is not strictly dichotomous, but primarily where they place the emphasis.

Nevertheless, there is a large literature on liberal-conservative differences on locus of control. One study noted that: "The results indicate supporters for the two major parties are wired differently, in line with previous findings about ideology. Democrats were driven by an external locus of control and Republicans by an internal locus" (Sweetser, 2014, p. 1183). Another study linked locus of control to motivation and belief in free will: “Evidence from three studies reveals a critical difference in self-control as a function of political ideology. Specifically, greater endorsement of political conservatism was associated with greater attention regulation and task persistence…this relationship is shown to stem from varying beliefs in freewill” (Clarkson, et al, 2015, p. 8250).

The liberal/progressive-conservative divide on locus of control was also showcased in Cooper, Walsh, and Ellis’ (2010) survey of criminologists who attended the 2007 American Society of Criminology conference. Criminologists were asked to reveal their political orientation and to rank what they considered the most important causes of crime. Consistent with locus of control differences, conservatives and moderates favored individual explanations most strongly, and liberals and radicals favored external explanations most strongly. The top three factors for