CHAPTER 14

The Baron de Montesquieu: Toward a Geography of Political Culture

1 The *Immortal*[1] Charles-Louis de Secondat, baron de La Bréde et de Montesquieu

Tracing "his lineage to both the nobility of the sword and that of the robe" (Rahe 2009; p. 18), Montesquieu assumed his place as a man of letters in the *Age of Reason*. Montesquieu earned that place through his authorship of an epistolary novel critiquing France in spite of its censorious monarchy (Montesquieu 1964),[2] as a curator of quips, observations and insights into taxes, power, perception, ambition, and society (Montesquieu 2012),[3] and as a great declinist after linking expansion and empire with decline and fall (Montesquieu 1965) in his *Considerations on the Causes of the Greatness of Romans and their Decline* (Carrithers et al. 2001; Courtney 2001a, b).

The temper of his writings comported with the constrained and conservative Scottish, English, and American Enlightenment Projects. Yet, Montesquieu lived in an increasingly progressive France wherein his acquaintance with, and respect for, the common law of the *Ancien Régime* appeared stodgy alongside a *bomb-thrower*[4] like Voltaire, while his reverence for, and defense of, Christianity appeared arcane alongside a deistical atheist like Diderot. Indeed, Montesquieu drew the ire of Condorcet and likeminded reformists because he chose to explain what was, rather than dictate what should be (Carrithers 2001b).

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As Rahe (2001; p. 76) states, "description is subordinate to prescription throughout." The contrast between Montesquieu, who was neither *strident* nor *doctrinaire*,[5] and his fellow Frenchmen is summarized expertly by Carrithers (2001a; p. 14):

> Unlike those later caught up in the momentum of events swirling beyond their control after 1789, Montesquieu was no revolutionary reformer seeking to hack through the dense underbrush of the present, imperfect world in order to completely weed out existing practices not in keeping with a radical blueprint whose superimposition on the present would require dislocating changes.

Montesquieu's allegiance to church and state, king and country, with all respective forms and flaws, came of an intellectual kinship with *Edmund Burke*, an archconservative envisioning human societies as an organic nexus of law, religion, and custom, such that each generation is bound by its ancestors and beholden to its heirs.

Not to overextend the comparison, but Montesquieu indeed saw elements of society in mutual relation, "ultimately linked together, as in a chain" (Carrithers 2001a; p. 15), to the end that isolated change in one quarter "produces everywhere a species of dissonance" (Rahe 2009; p. 165). Montesquieu was decidedly more utilitarian than humanitarian, for he denounced financial peculation, agitated for freedom of conscience, despised despotism, and decried harsh punishment, secondarily from high-minded ideals aimed at advancing social justice and improving the lives of subjects, and primarily relative to policy and political stability (Montesquieu 1964; p. xviii; in the introduction by George R. Healy). In this way, he was as pragmatic as America's *Father Abraham*,[6] who weighed abolition only so far as it figured in the balance of federal persistence.[7]

2 A Temple to Boredom and to Patience

"Here I am at book XXIX, and I have not begun it without making new sacrificial offerings and without having built a temple to Boredom and to Patience" (Montesquieu 2012; p. 579). Thus, Montesquieu spoke as he struggled to write *The Spirit of the Laws*. Likewise recorded in his *Pensées*, we find Montesquieu reckoning with challenges of organization and synthesis alongside the tedium and toil: "I have labored for twenty

straight years on this work, and I still do not know whether I have been courageous or reckless, whether I have been overwhelmed by the size or sustained by the majesty of my subject" (Montesquieu 2012; p. 558). Montesquieu's efforts were not in vain! A score of years, along with overriding patience and uncommon brilliance, generated a *classic in the pantheon of Western philosophy.* The Spirit of the Laws drew praise, frequently unalloyed praise, from Rousseau, D'Alembert, Marat, and other fellow Frenchmen, while finding equal favor across the pond, across the channel, and across the continent (Carrithers 2001a). Rahe (2009; p. xviii) most fully documents the influence of this Enlightenment classic and the authority that accrued to its author:

> All in all, it would be fair to say that *De L'Esprit des Lois* was a publishing phenomenon. It was that, and it was much, much more. For, as the eventful second half of the eighteenth century began, Montesquieu's great work became the political Bible of learned men and would-be statesmen everywhere in Europe, and beyond. In Britain, it shaped the thinking of Edmund Burke, Edward Gibbon, William Blackstone, Adam Smith, Adam Ferguson, William Robertson, John Millar, Lord Karnes, and Dugald Stewart among others…In Italy, it had a profound effect on Cesare Beccaria, and in Germany, it was fundamental for Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. In France, it was the starting point for all subsequent political thought. Its impact can hardly be overestimated.

The Spirit of the Laws was published in 1748, positioning it to influence the scholar–statesmen of British America. In The Federalist, James Madison called the author of The Spirit of Laws an "oracle," and both Madison[8] and Alexander Hamilton spoke of him as "the celebrated Montesquieu." "They sensed what subsequent scholarship has shown to be true: That no political writer was more often cited and none was thought to be of greater authority in the era of American constitution-making" (Rahe 2009; p. xix).

Acknowledged or unacknowledged, directly or indirectly, Montesquieu's ideas wend through the words of many a modern author. When reading them side by side, it would seem that Montesquieu was Huntington's preceptor. Serving as a more contemporary example, Vanhanen[9] (2009; p. 5), in his investigation of biogeographic differences in intelligence, acknowledges Montesquieu's influence prominently within his introductory chapter of *The Limits of Democratization*:

> Montesquieu was the first to pay serious attention to the impact of climate on human nature, and thence on political and other human conditions. He argued that many variations in human conditions can be traced to great differences in geographical and climatic conditions in the world. He assumed that temperature influences the human body and the mind and passions of people, and that consequently there are many differences in people's mores, manners, and characteristics between hot and cold climates. He assumed that such differences in human nature are reflected in social and political institutions.

In this, there is not a whiff of overstatement. Montesquieu was pursuing radically new lines of inquiry (Brewer 2008), such that, in his day, under the French Monarchy, casual familiarity with The Spirit of the Laws was dangerous (Gay 1969). Montesquieu broke the bonds of parochialism to launch "a new type of social science that blended politics and history with emerging lines of thought best described as comparative, anthropological, ethnological and sociological" (Carrithers 2001a; p. 11). In doing so, Montesquieu rejected chance as the explanation of governmental systems (Carrithers 2001a). As Marvin Harris would later insist with respect to mores, Montesquieu discovered order and logic even amidst apparently *whimsical* and *bizarre* laws of nations (Rahe 2009).

The content of his loosely arranged tome extends from the functionalist philosophy, part Burkean and part Lincolnian, described in the previous section. Nevertheless, unique to Montesquieu, and nearly novel at the time, the interconnected fabric of society was understood to be constrained by climate. He theorized that "each form of government is associated with a ruling principle: Monarchy with honor; Despotism with fear, democracy with equality" (d'Alembert 2015; p. 6).[10] Physical and environmental factors, not limited to climate, topography, terrain, and soil quality, elicit social practices such as slavery, polygyny, despotism, or servility (Carrithers 2001a; Montesquieu 1984). For instance, hot climates are enervating, promoting passivity, idleness, a "paralyzing diffidence," and an "extreme sensitivity to erotic pleasures." Within hot climates, Montesquieu likewise found less in the way of *curiosity, noble enterprise, generous sentiment* (Rahe 2009; p. 156), in addition to less sexual restraint; with the collective result being that "despotism [is] unavoidable in hot climates" (Rahe 2009). Alternatively, extending from Sweden to Spain, are temperate climates, which are *more conducive to liberty* because of their balance between extremes of temperature and extremes of soil fecundity (d'Alembert 2015; Rahe 2009; Montesquieu 1984, 2015).[11]

3 A Life History Accounting of Governmental Forms

Caveats crowd upon the mind's field. Putting them aside for the sake of clarity, we advance the following thesis: *population level life history speed partially predicts governmental organization*.[12]

As Montesquieu posited, ecology is indeed related to government, but that relationship is, in the main, indirect. If Huntington, in a post-Darwinian era of science, could not get beyond the immediate effects of climate to carefully consider its evolutionary consequences, Montesquieu, in a pre-Darwinian era of philosophy, could have no hope of so doing. Not to deny direct ecological effects as described by Montesquieu, but it is extremely important to note that a share, one might be so bold as to say the lion's share, of ecological influence on governmental forms is mediated by evolutionary adaptation. Without recognizing evolutionary responses as powerful intermediaries, correlation is confused with causation. For instance, when associating republican forms with niggardly soils, Montesquieu would have done better to associate the soil with an evolutionary stimulus, and only thereafter to governmental forms. Of course, it is Montesquieu's bold line of inquiry rather than the accuracy of his conclusions for which he is justly celebrated.

Extending from ecology as a first cause, there are vast differences in behavior that separate the ends of the life history distribution, some of which difference obliquely effects polity organization. After all, what is evident on a personal level will be so on population level. The meta-effect might not be straightforwardly additive or cumulative, but, after appreciating all appropriate nuance,[13] it is our point that culture and civilization are, in part and after some fashion, reducible to the aggregate biological composition of the population. This granted, fast life history populations are *fLH*-selected for all life history traits, which implies the now familiar aggregate of biodemographic, sociological, and psychological factors. With respect to specific life history traits as they relate to societal organization, intelligence, an individual psychological factor within the life history framework (Vanhanen 1997, 2000, 2004; Lynn and Vanhanen 2002),[14] has received the most attention. Certainly, intelligence may be a prerequisite to avoiding demagoguery. The legerdemain of the specious argument, like the artifice of Machiavellian policy, is unthinkingly consumed by ill-informed and uneducated populations of lower intelligence. Intelligence, paired with education, may well function

in tandem, affording an understanding of abstract principles, such as the separation of powers, the ability to distinguish between offices and office holders, and other Republican elements. Beyond elevated general intelligence, *sLH*-selected populations are apt to branch out at their extreme end like a candelabra neuron[15] with its variegated dendritic arbor. This phenomena, described as *cognitive differentiation integration effort*, or *CD-IE effects* (Woodley et al. 2013; Fernandes 2014; Woodley and Fernandes 2014), may well supply the biological capital out of which governmental theorists and bureaucratic staffers, respectively, create and perpetuate the complex state.

Yet, other life history traits may be as important. We presently emphasize life history traits relative to *cooperation* and *family organization*. With respect to *cooperation*, population-level conscientiousness, a *sLH*-selected personality variable (Figueredo et al. 2005, 2006; Hertler 2016), may inform loyalty and conventional adherence to established authority (Hertler 2015a, b). Agreeableness, another personality trait that, on average, is found among the *sLH*-selected (Figueredo et al. 2014; Manson 2015), may play a similar part. Cooperation is also fostered by the *sLH*-selected cognitive features collected under the category of *executive control* (Wenner et al. 2013). Emanating from the frontal cortex, executive control imparts restraint, planning, and future-oriented thought, and in turn raises the threshold for violence, impulsivity, and hedonism. Implications for rebellion and revolution follow from such traits. The *sLH*-selected are expert in solving *collective action problems*, allowing cooperative irrigation, election of delegates, formation of joint stock companies, creation of factories, and formation of hierarchical bureaucracies. From these inclinations, slow life history populations are more apt to rise above the basest Malthusian constraints which might otherwise precipitate conflict and strife, to create stable governmental structures capable of ritualizing factionalism and conflict within established, non-violent forms.

Alongside mating competition, *family organization* is an exceedingly influential factor in governmental stability because it informs the role of men, and the structure of the family, or in other words, the atoms from which the state is constructed. As first introduced in Chapter 10, polygyny[16] and monogamy are, respectively, *fLH*-selected and *sLH*-selected mating styles. Polygynous mating systems exaggerate reproductive variance, lavishly rewarding some males with outsized paternity, at

the expense of others consigned to reproductive oblivion (Darwin 1962; Low 2003). "Males are not expected to become parental," Shuster and Wade (2003; p. 317) remind us, "when male aggressiveness and display enhance male mating success." Instead, these are the conditions for contest competition wherein males compete, fight, and kill for reproductive access. In contrast, *sLH*-selected societies are more strictly, or at least socially, monogamous, with males being sequestered in stable relationships, routinely becoming fathers and providers apt to engage in parental effort above mating effort. As Betzig (1986; p. 88) noted, *despotism*, "virtually invariably coincides with the greatest degree of polygyny, and presumably, with a correspondingly high degree of differential reproduction."

Cooperation, family organization, and other relevant traits broadly affect what might be called *tractability*, the degree to which a population can be ordered and controlled by its leaders. The slower the life history speed, the more tractable the population; the more prone it is to organization; the easier its component individuals can be aggregated into coherent societies. Hobbesian fears of anarchy apply to all societies, but most pointedly to societies composed of *fLH*-selected populations over which it is more difficult to establish a monopoly of violence. Recalling life history speed to be fastest in Africa, slowest in Asia, and intermediate in Europe (Rushton 2000), there is the expectation that African populations will organize generally into smaller and less stable structures, such as tribes and chieftains prone to fission and fusion, whereas Asian societies will organize generally into larger and more stable structures, such as nations and empires prone to continuity and collectivism.[17] Then, there is Europe. Being intermediate in life history speed, it follows that European societies would be intermediate in their governmental organization. They neither have the raw freedoms of historical African societies nor the steady obedience to emperor or empire characteristic of many Asian societies. Instead, Europeans, on balance, have proved tractable enough to form stable societies that rule over large spaces and across much time only via a dynamic stability generated of opposing forces. Opposing parties, individuals, powers, and factions form and fight, but importantly, they often do so within routinized and ritualized forums, tugging and towing across a centrist position. In illustration, many European polities, especially Western European polities modelled on the Anglo-Saxon tradition, have systems of checks and

balances wherein powers are divided between executive and legislative, judicial and executive, local and federal, lay and ecclesiastic. Moreover, the intermediate life history speed of Europeans may also broadly inform the West's traditions of Republican forms, delegated powers, and popular participation.

4 Available Support

Some of the above assertions have been supported. Specifically, in Chapter 2, while presenting the work of Ellsworth Huntington, J. P. Rushton's findings were reviewed as they broadly establish life history differences across continental populations. Further, in Chapter 10, which treated family sociologist James Casey, connections between life history and mating systems have been explored; suffice it to recall on this score that ruler polygamy, measured by harem size across 186 societies, was found predominately in Africa, and overwhelmingly below the 40th parallel as per a review by Betzig (1986; pp. 92–93; Table 5.1). Before leaving the subject, it is only proper to also refer to Low's (1988) global maps positively associating pathogen stress with polygyny, which can be read alongside Murdock's investigations, some of which were reviewed in Chapter 11.

Vanhanen, previously quoted, used mean temperature to predict intelligence, which in turn predicted democratization. While from a life history perspective, Vanhanen's model misinterprets climate in some of the ways that it is misinterpreted in Montesquieu's and Huntington's writings, it nonetheless clearly associates intelligence, a robust life history correlate at the population level, with democratization. Vanhanen (2009; p. 241) remarks that democratization is expressed most commonly within European countries, or their former colonial possessions, what Crosby (1986) has called *Neo-Europes*. Vanhanen's intelligence-based model thereafter correctly predicts lower levels of democratization in Africa, but seems to falter when applied to Asia. Above, we have subsumed intelligence into life history theory and substituted *democratization* for *social stability*; with that, we find a model congruent with Rushton's cross-continental divisions across the life history continuum.

We could productively review, qualify, and critique additional publications by Vanhanen (1989, 1990, 2000, 2004) and other works coauthored with Richard Lynn (2012a, b), as they are generally supportive of our thesis when their emphasis on intelligence is properly contextualized

within life history theory; however, we forebear because doing so will not answer the following question: *Is biogeographical life history variation associated with governmental forms in any fine grained analysis extending beyond the broad intercontinental differences marked out by Rushton*? As a start to answering such questions, Figueredo et al. (2017) studied the social biogeography of sixty-six countries within Africa, Europe, and Asia, ultimately explaining eighty-eight percent of the variance in aggregate cognitive abilities, but also in related life history correlates featured within an integrated model of social biogeography. The physical ecological conditions valued by Montesquieu as direct determinants were here found to influence, along with concomitant community ecology conditions, the following biometric markers of life history: social equality, within-group and between-group peace, sexual equality, macroeconomic diversification, and human capital. Lastly, though it cannot yet be cited, we refer to emerging data collection, the qualitative viewing of which suggests a positive relationship between slow life history speeds and the durability of national sovereignty as variously measured by *date of state formation, last date of territorial acquisition*, and *external conquest*.

Lastly, we close by recalling just a fraction of those caveats, the consideration of which would have swallowed up our thesis before it was born, and which even now threatens to dilute its impression. *Consanguinity*, the relatedness of groups, according to an investigation by Woodley and Bell (2013), supersedes intelligence in predictive power, such that consanguineous populations less often proceed to democratization. Then, of course climatic factors, such as resource distribution and geographic boundaries, do in fact have direct effects, as Montesquieu claimed. Further still, there are accidents of history, influential individuals, repressive regimes (Weede 1993), corporate structures (Korten 1998), income inequalities (Burkhart 1997), economic systems (Bourguignon and Verdier 2000), educational attainment (Castelló-Climent 2008), infrastructure (Brown and Mobarak 2009), and infectious disease (Briscoe 2003; Kalipeni and Oppong 1998; Hotez and Thompson 2009). These are all important! Not to reverse the effect of our current attempt to reconstitute life history effects into the broader explanatory matrix, but we would be remiss if we cast life history into the lists as simply one among many variables that get some small share of the explanatory spoils. On the other hand, it is not exactly that we claim for it a larger share; but recall that life history theory is itself a multifaceted variable, which has connections, both causal and correlative, with nearly all the

aforementioned factors. Yes, disease and natural disasters can directly affect government, but they have had evolutionary effects on the life history speed of those populations living amidst disease and disaster; yes, economic systems, corporate structures, and income distribution can directly affect government, but to some extent these factors are constrained by life history, and so are partly expressions of it; yes, intelligence and education alternately potentiate or restrict democratization, but intelligence and education are increasingly understood as lower order life history variables. In other words, we warn of speciously separating these factors, as they influenced the evolution of life history speed among populations, or are otherwise partially expressions of that life history speed.

Notes

1. The Italian proto-criminologist Beccaria, in his *On Crimes and Punishments*, wrote of the *immortal* Montesquieu (Carrithers 2001b).
2. Montesquieu, C. (1964). *The Persian letters.* Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company.
3. • "The higher taxes are, the more inclined good people are to shun collecting them. The higher taxes are, the less inclined good people are to scruple about cheating on them" (Montesquieu 2012; p. 574).
   • "If I wanted to know a prince's power, I would not bother entering his palace, looking at the beauty of his gardens, the wealth of his retinue, the servility of his courtiers…Royal splendor always begins with these two points: rich citizens and well-paid soldiers" (Montesquieu 2012; p. 614).
   • "One scarred man [secondary to smallpox] will make more of an impression than a hundred successes [of inoculation]. One needs to know how to calculate" (Montesquieu 2012; p. 663).
   • "Their ambition is like the horizon, which is always moving before them".
   • A state of nature leaves man like animals, at the mercy of might (as per d'Alembert 2015; p. 4).
4. This descriptive phrase relating to Voltaire taken from Rahe (2009; p. 16).
5. On the other hand, we do not forebear to point out how in certain instances Montesquieu succumbed to idealism. One of those instances relates to his strangely inverting what an evolutionist would see as the natural order of things. Specifically, he believed, according to Healy (1964), that the family should be preferred to the individual, the nation to the family, the region to the nation, and the human species to race or region. This is contrary to kin selection theory (Hamilton, 1964a, b),

and thereafter genetic similarity theory (Rushton et al. 1984), both of which theories explain the evolutionary impulses to do exactly opposite Montesquieu's prescription.

6. This appellation for Abraham Lincoln was sometimes bestowed by newly liberated slaves.
7. The comparison between Montesquieu and Lincoln is apt because both appear to have had liberal sentiments and humane inclinations, and both subordinated these sentiments and inclinations to matters of policy, political concern, law, and social stability.
8. As an interesting aside, which is documented by Carey (2012) and can be seen directly in the *Federalist* (Hamilton et al. 2005), Madison ended up rejecting Montesquieu's authority as it related to the size of republics. Whereas Montesquieu insisted on limited extent and population to ensure unity, Madison dispenses with the need for unity, and with it, the territorial constraints unity imposes.
9. Having reviewed Montesquieu's general position, Vanhanen (2009; p. 6) goes on to revive it. In doing so, he specifies the following thesis:

> So my theoretical argument is that the great variation in the level of democratization can be traced causally first to the variation in the distribution of important power resources, further to the variation in the average mental abilities of nations, and finally to the variation in climatic conditions.

   As can be seen, Vanhanen's ultimate goal was to explain the present distribution of democracies. As discussed at length, Vanhanen observes, as did Montesquieu after his own fashion, that popular participation, or what one might term democracy or liberty, shows a skewed geographic distribution, being concentrated in colder climates. For Vanhanen, *democratization* is the variable of interest, which is proximately explained by variation in *national intelligence* and *resource distribution* which, in turn, are ultimately explained by variation in *mean annual temperature*. This research is quite important, though our own thesis embeds intelligence, and to some extent resource distribution, within a larger life history framework.
10. Or as said by the same author at greater length and in more detail: "In monarchies, education ought to have for its object politeness and reciprocal civilities: in despotic states, terror, and the debasing the spirits of men. In republics they have occasion for all the force of education: it ought to inspire a sentiment which is noble, but hard to be attained, that disregard to our own interest from whence the love of our country arises" (d'Alembert 2015; p. 7).

11. Though the extrapolations from the topic are perhaps ill-founded, Montesquieu notes a connection between maturation rate among women and climate in the following passage:

> It is certain that women are nubile in warm climates at eight, ten, twelve years of age, and are immediately old; that is, that childhood and marriage are almost always together. (Montesquieu 2012; p. 224)

The exaggeration of the point in no way invalidates it; life history theory, especially through Rushton's early researches, suggests faster maturation of more *fLH*-selected populations living in tropical regions.

12. Here, the concept of the *extended phenotype* is applicable. One can say that governments are, in some abstracted way, extended phenotypes of group level life history values. The extended phenotype is a behavioral disposition that is part of an organism's evolved architecture. It often serves the same function as a physical feature, as will be further discussed in Chapter 16.
13. Here, we relegate any further caveats to this footnote to preserve the flow of the main thesis. Suffice it even here to say, we are not insisting that group properties are straightforwardly or solely reducible to the aggregate of individual properties. Amidst the power of individual leaders, randomness, emergent effects, and much else, we only claim that the individual has some bearing on the whole.
14. Vanhanen studied climate and intelligence independent of life history theory.
15. Also known as Purkinje cells, these are concentrated in the cerebellum and seem to have the most complex interconnecting dendritic branches of all the neuronal types.
16. Montesquieu speaks of the rapid maturity of women in hotter climates as a stimulus to polygyny. In this way, he was sensing connections among life history correlates. However, like later social scientists, in inferring a direct causal relation among these variables, he was necessarily blinded to third factors and more overarching explanatory frameworks.
17. One might remonstrate: larger societies and settled civilizations were once absent in, for instance, Northern Europe, while they were present, for instance, in Egypt and throughout the Middle East. Yes, it was so. Climate has been inconstant, and mean life history speeds of populations are as well. We are in no way arguing that this was always the state of affairs. As Huntington states, there was a *March of Civilization*, such that high civilization crept northward through recorded history. In an area that deserves significant scholarly attention, there is likely an evolutionary basis that partly corresponds to this northward march.

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