A Preface
To
Democratic Theory

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CHAPTER 3

Polyarchal
Democracy

I

Examination of Madisonian and populistic theory suggests at least two possible methods one might employ to construct a theory of democracy. One way, the method of maximization, is to specify a set of goals to be maximized; democracy can then be defined in terms of the specific governmental processes necessary to maximize these goals or some among them. The two theories we have been considering are essentially of this type: Madisonian theory postulates a non-tyrannical republic as the goal to be maximized; populistic theory postulates popular sovereignty and political equality. A second way—this one might be called the descriptive method—is to consider as a single class of phenomena all those nation states and social organizations that are commonly called democratic by political scientists, and by examining the members of this class to discover, first, the distinguishing characteristics they have in common, and, second, the necessary and sufficient conditions for social organizations possessing these characteristics.

These are not, however, mutually exclusive methods. And we shall see that if we begin by employing the first method it will soon become necessary to employ something rather like the second as well.

II

We discovered in chapter 2 that the goals of populistic democracy and the simple Rule deduced from these goals do not provide us with anything like a complete theory. One basic defect of the theory is that

it does no more than to provide a formal redefinition of one necessary procedural rule for the perfect or ideal attainment of political equality and popular sovereignty; but because the theory is no more than an exercise in axiomatics, it tells us nothing about the real world. However, let us now pose the key question in slightly different form: What are the necessary and sufficient conditions for maximizing democracy in the real world? I shall show that the words "in the real world" fundamentally alter the problem.

Let us begin, however, with a meticulous concern for precision of meaning. First, what do we mean by "maximizing democracy"? Evidently here, as in populistic theory, we must proceed by regarding democracy as a state of affairs constituting a limit, and all actions approaching the limit will be maximizing actions. But how shall we describe the state of affairs constituting the limit?

The model of populistic democracy suggests three possible characteristics that might be made operationally meaningful: (1) Whenever policy choices are perceived to exist, the alternative selected and enforced as governmental policy is the alternative most preferred by the members. (2) Whenever policy choices are perceived to exist, in the process of choosing the alternative to be enforced as government policy, the preference of each member is assigned an equal value. (3) The Rule: In choosing among alternatives, the alternative preferred by the greater number is selected.

To make the first of these operational we must either ignore the problem of different intensities of preference among individuals or find ourselves in so deep a morass of obstacles to observation and comparison that it would be very nearly impossible to say whether or not the characteristic in fact exists. I shall return to this problem in the next chapter. But if we ignore intensities, then in effect we adopt the second characteristic as our criterion: that the preference of each member is assigned an equal value. It would appear at first glance that the question whether the preference of each member of an organization is assigned an equal value is more or less susceptible of observation. Likewise the third characteristic, the Rule, should be observable. But since the Rule is deducible from the first two characteristics, would it not be

enough simply to examine a social organization in order to discover the extent to which the Rule is or is not followed? That is, do we have in the Rule an adequate definition of the limit of democracy? Suppose we observe that a majority prefers x to y, and x happens to be selected as government policy. Yet it may be that among the majority is a dictator; if he were in the minority, then y would be selected. The condition of political equality evidently requires "interchangeability," i.e., the interchange of an equal number of individuals from one side to another would not affect the outcome of the decision. But how can we observe whether interchangeability is present? Evidently no single decision provides us with enough information, for at best a single decision can only reveal that the Rule is not being followed and that political equality therefore does not exist during that decision. We can infer interchangeability only by examining a large number of cases. What can we actually observe even in a large number of decisions?

Suppose we observe that when A is with a majority, the majority choice is made the policy of the organization; and when A is with a minority, the minority choice becomes policy. Evidently interchangeability is violated. But what we have observed is nothing more than the extent to which the Rule is employed in more than one case. So far, then, the concept "political equality" does not suggest a set of observations other than those necessary to determine whether the Rule is or is not followed.

Now let us suppose that A is always with the majority and the majority choice is always enforced as policy. Yet we suspect that if A were with a minority, the minority choice would be enforced. What observations must we now make to determine whether or not our hunch is correct? Here we come to an important conclusion: If we take any specific action, such as the outcome of balloting, as a satisfactory index of preference, then no operational tests exist for determining political equality, other than those necessary for determining whether the Rule is or is not being followed. That is, given the expression of preferences as adequate, the only operational test for political equality is the extent to which the Rule is followed in a number of cases. Hence, assuming the validity of the expressed preferences, one can never properly

speak of a particular decision as "democratic" but only of a series of decisions. (One can, of course, properly specify a particular decision as not democratic.) Hence our key question now becomes: What events must we observe in the real world in order to determine the extent to which the Rule is employed in an organization?

Unfortunately, the phrase "given the expression of preferences" harbors some serious difficulties. What kinds of activity shall we take as indices of preference? At one extreme we could rely on some overt act of choosing, such as casting a ballot or making a statement.[1] At the other extreme, through deep and careful probing we could search for psychological evidence. If the first is often naïve, the second is impossible on a sufficient scale. In practice most of us adopt a middle course and take our clues from the prevailing environment in which the particular preference is expressed. In one environment we accept the overt act of voting as an adequate if imperfect index; in another we reject it entirely.

Therefore it is of crucial importance to specify the particular stage in the decision process at which we propose to take the expression of preference as given. It is entirely consistent to say that at one stage the Rule is employed, and hence at that level the decision is definitionally "democratic"; and at the same time to say that at another stage the Rule is not employed and the decision at that stage is not democratic. In the actual world of governmental politics in the United States, the only stage at which the Rule is at all closely approximated seems to be during vote counting in elections and legislative bodies. In the prevoting stage many influences, including those of superior wealth and control over organizational resources, so greatly exaggerate the power of the few as compared with the many that the social processes leading up to the process of voting may properly be spoken of as highly inegalitarian and undemocratic, although less so than in a dictatorship.[2]

1. More accurately, in using votes and opinion polls we generally rely on some overt statements of individuals who compile the returns.

2. It is conceivable that the converse could exist, i.e., a dictatorship that rejected the Rule at the voting level but organized the society so that the prevoting stages of decision-making were highly democratic. But I am unaware of such a society. Sympathetic Western interpreters of Soviet communism have sometimes suggested

Thus there is possible in democratic theory a kind of finite regression to different stages in the decision process; but so long as one is quite clear as to which stage one is describing, some of the common ambiguities can be avoided.

III

The effect of the argument so far is to divide our key question into two: (1) What acts shall we consider sufficient to constitute an expression of individual preferences at a given stage in the decision process? (2) Taking these acts as an expression of preferences, what events must we observe in order to determine the extent to which the Rule is employed in the organization we are examining? We are still looking, let us remember, for a set of limiting conditions to be approached.

At a minimum, two stages need to be distinguished: the election stage[3] and the interelection stage. The election stage in turn consists of at least three periods which it is useful to distinguish: the voting period, the prevoting period, and the postvoting period. (It would be possible to define the duration of these periods more precisely in particular cases but no general definition is likely to be very useful. Hence in what follows the duration of each is unspecified.)

During the voting period we would need to observe the extent to which at least three conditions exist:

1. Every member of the organization performs the acts we assume to constitute an expression of preference among the scheduled alternatives, e.g., voting.

2. In tabulating these expressions (votes), the weight assigned to the choice of each individual is identical.

3. The alternative with the greatest number of votes is declared the winning choice.

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such a relationship there, but the evidence seems overwhelming that both the social structure and the decision process in politics are extremely inegalitarian. Something like this, however, seems to permeate the Webbs' curious picture of the U.S.S.R. in *Soviet Communism: A New Civilization?*

3. Election is used here in a broad sense. To apply the analysis to the internal operation of an organization that is itself constituted through elections, such as a legislative body, one would consider votes on measures as "the election stage."

The connection between these three conditions and the Rule is self-evident. If the act of expressing preferences is taken as given, then these conditions appear to constitute necessary and sufficient conditions for the operation of the Rule during the voting period.[4] But it is equally self-evident that we have thus far begged the first of our questions. A totalitarian plebiscite might meet—and indeed in practice evidently often has met—these three conditions better than a national election or legislative decision in countries that most Western political scientists would call democratic. The crux of the problem is in our first question, what we take to constitute an expression of individual preference. Can it not be truthfully said that the peasant who casts his ballot for the dictatorship is expressing his preferences among the scheduled alternatives as he sees them? For, perhaps, the alternatives he sees are either to vote for the dictatorship or to take a journey to Siberia. That is, in one sense, every human decision can be regarded as a conscious or unconscious choice of the preferred alternative among those perceived by the actor. Likewise, the most corrupt urban political machines in this country often meet these requirements when the ward-heelers do not actually stuff the ballot boxes or tamper with the returns; for they provide a sufficient number of unscrupulous hangers-on with a simple alternative: a few dollars if you vote our slate and nothing if you vote for the other side.

In a rough sense, the essence of all competitive politics is bribery of the electorate by politicians. How then shall we distinguish the vote of

4. Condition 1 must be interpreted with care, for the expression "acts" is open to ambiguity. Suppose that the members of the organization must choose between alternatives x and y; every member has a preference for one or the other; and the ratio of those who prefer x to those who prefer y is a/b. Then so long as those who actually vote do so in this ratio, the magnitude of the vote is not strictly relevant. All that is required for the Rule is that the voters be fully representative of all the members. Indeed, in a choice among only two alternatives, the Rule would be satisfied even more easily, for it would only require that if $a/b > 1$, then $a_1/b_1 > 1$, and if $a/b < 1$, then $a_1/b_1 < 1$, where a_1 is the number of voters who prefer x and b_1 the number of voters who prefer y. However, in terms of observables, by what "act" do we know the ratio a/b, if not by voting or some equivalent to it? So that if we are concerned with observables and do not require Condition 1 for the voting process itself, then we must require it for some prior act that we "assume to constitute an expression of preference among the scheduled alternatives" and on which the outcome of the voting itself is partly dependent.

the Soviet peasant or the bribed stumble-bum from the farmer who supports a candidate committed to high support prices, the business-man who supports an advocate of low corporation taxes, or the con-sumer who votes for candidates opposed to a sales tax? I assume that we wish to exclude expressions of preference of the first kind but to include the second. For if we do not exclude the first, then any distinc-tion between totalitarian and democratic systems is fatuous; but if we exclude the second, then surely no examples of even the most proximate democracies can be found to exist anywhere. We can hardly afford to read the human race out of democratic politics.

This is a problem that calls for subtle distinctions, yet, so far as I am aware, it is not much treated in the literature. The distinction we seek is evidently not to be found in the magnitude of the rewards or dep-rivations resulting from the choice; the gain of the stumble-bum is paltry indeed, and by comparison with the gain of the large corporate stockholder it is microscopic. If we simply take as our criterion the magnitude of the possible deprivations for making a wrong choice,[5] then to be sure, one of the alternatives perceived by the Russian peasant may be more than human flesh and spirit were ever meant for; but by comparison the Western voter who perceives the alternatives among candidates as nuclear war or cold peace is not far removed from the plight of the Russian peasant.

What we balk at in accepting the vote of the Soviet citizen as an expression of preference is that he is not permitted to choose among all the alternatives that we, as outside observers, regard as in some sense potentially available to him. If he is faced with the alternatives: x vote for the ruling slate or y vote against the ruling slate, followed by living death in a concentration camp, his preference for x over y is as genuine as any you are likely to find in any election anywhere. But if he could schedule the alternatives to include z, vote against the ruling slate with no foreseeable punishment following, then we are more likely to accept the outcome of his choice among this set of alternatives, even if the set

5. Some might propose that the test be based on the public v. private or social v. selfish quality of the choice. But analysis would show either that this distinction is meaningless or else that few, if any, cases of the former exist, i.e., if not meaning-less the distinction is irrelevant to our problem.

is from our point of view by no means perfect. We might now expect him to prefer z to x and x to y; but if he stubbornly prefers x to z we are no longer on sound footing in rejecting the results of the plebiscite, if they otherwise conform to the three conditions set forth above.

What we have done, then, is to formulate a fourth limiting condition, one that must exist in the prevoting period governing the scheduling of alternatives for the voting period.

4. Any member who perceives a set of alternatives, at least one of which he regards as preferable to any of the alternatives presently scheduled, can insert his preferred alternative(s) among those scheduled for voting.

Even so, our problem is not entirely solved. For suppose that a group of voters is known to prefer x to y and y to z. But A, who prefers y to z and z to x, possesses a monopoly of information and persuades the other voters that x is not an available or relevant alternative. Hence no one proposes x and the voters choose y. All of our four conditions are complied with; yet most of us will not accept a prevoting period governed by this kind of monopoly control over information. Therefore we must lay down a fifth condition operating in the prevoting period.

5. All individuals possess identical information about the alternatives.

Perhaps three remarks need to be made. If one is dismayed by the Utopian character of the last two requirements, it is worth recalling that we are looking for conditions that may be used as limits against which real world achievement can actually be measured. Moreover, even if the fifth condition were to exist in full, voters might choose an alternative they would have rejected if they had possessed more information, i.e., the fifth condition is certainly no guarantee of cosmic rationality. At best it permits us to say that the choice has not been manipulated by controls over information possessed by any one individual or group. Finally, it must be admitted that the fourth and fifth conditions are by no means as easily observable as the first three; in practice the observer would be forced to accept some crude indices for the existence of these last two conditions, and, to this extent, the set of limiting conditions we intended to set out as observable must themselves be interpreted by still other unspecified phenomena susceptible of observation.

At first glance it might be thought that these five conditions are sufficient to guarantee the operation of the Rule; but, at least in principle, it would be possible for a regime to permit these conditions to operate through the prevoting and voting periods and then simply to ignore the results. Consequently, we must postulate at least two more conditions for the postvoting period both of which are sufficiently obvious to need no discussion:

6. Alternatives (leaders or policies) with the greatest number of votes displace any alternatives (leaders or policies) with fewer votes.

7. The orders of elected officials are executed.

These, then, constitute our set of more or less observable limiting conditions which when present during the election stage will be taken as evidence for the maximal operation of the Rule, which in turn is taken as evidence for the maximal attainment of political equality and popular sovereignty. What of the interelection stage? If our argument so far is correct, then maximization of political equality and popular sovereignty in the interelection stage would require:

8.1. Either that all interelection decisions are subordinate or executory to those arrived at during the election stage, i.e., elections are in a sense controlling

8.2. Or that new decisions during the interelection period are governed by the preceding seven conditions, operating, however, under rather different institutional circumstances

8.3. Or both.

IV

I think it may be laid down dogmatically that no human organization—certainly none with more than a handful of people—has ever met or is ever likely to meet these eight conditions. It is true that the second, third, and sixth conditions are quite precisely met in some organizations, although in the United States corrupt practices sometimes nullify even these; the others are, at best, only crudely approximated.

As to the first, evidently in all human organizations there are significant variations in participation in political decisions—variations which in the United States appear to be functionally related to such variables as degree of concern or involvement, skill, access, socio-

economic status, education, residence, age, ethnic and religious identifications, and some little understood personality characteristics. As is well known, in national elections on the average something like half of all adults in the United States go to the polls; only a quarter do anything more than vote: write to their congressmen, for example, or contribute to campaigns, or attempt to persuade others to adopt their political views.[6] In the 1952 election, of one nationwide sample only 11 per cent helped the political parties financially, attended party gatherings, or worked for one of the parties or candidates; only 27 per cent talked to other people to try to show them why they should vote for one of the parties or candidates.[7] The effective political elites, then, operate within limits often vague and broad, although occasionally narrow and well defined, set by their expectations as to the reactions of the group of politically active citizens who go to the polls. Other organizations, such as trade-unions, where political equality is prescribed in the formal charter, operate in much the same way, although the elites and the politically active members are often even a smaller proportion of the total.[8]

In no organization of which I have any knowledge does the fourth condition exist. Perhaps the condition is most closely approximated in very small groups. Certainly in all large groups for which we have any data, control over communication is so unevenly distributed that some individuals possess considerably more influence over the designation of the alternatives scheduled for voting than do others. I do not know how to quantify this control, but if it could be quantified I suppose that it would be no exaggeration to say that Mr. Henry Luce has a

6. For example, see Julian L. Woodward and Elmo Roper, "Political Activity of American Citizens," *American Political Science Review*, December, 1950.

7. Angus Campbell, Gerald Gurin, and Warren E. Miller, *The Voter Decides* (Evanston: Row, Peterson & Co., 1954), p. 30, Table 3.1.

8. S. M. Lipset, "The Political Process in Trade Unions: A Theoretical Statement," in *Freedom and Control in Modern Society*, ed. M. Berger, T. Abel, and C. H. Page (New York: D. Van Nostrand Co., Inc., 1954). Joseph Goldstein, *The Government of British Trade Unions: A Study of Apathy and the Democratic Process in the Transport and General Workers Union* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1952). Bernard Barber, "Participation and Mass Apathy in Associations," *Studies in Leadership*, ed. A. W. Gouldner (New York: Harper & Bros., 1950).

thousand or ten thousand times greater control over the alternatives scheduled for debate and tentative decision at a national election than I do. Although we have here a formidable problem that so far as I know has never been adequately analyzed, it is a reasonable preliminary hypothesis that the number of individuals who exercise significant control over the alternatives scheduled is, in most organizations, only a tiny fraction of the total membership. This seems to be the case even in the most democratic organizations if the membership is at all large.

Much the same remarks apply to the fifth condition. The gap in information between the political elites and the active members—not to say the inactive members—no doubt is almost always great. In recent times the gap has been further widened in national governments by growing technical complexities and the rapid spread of security regulations. As every student of bureaucracy knows, the seventh condition is the source of serious difficulties; however, the extent to which this condition is achieved is perhaps the most puzzling of all to measure objectively.

If elections, like the market, were continuous, then we should have no need of the eighth condition. But of course elections are only periodic. It is sometimes suggested that the interelection pressures on decision processes are a kind of election, but this is at best only a deceptive metaphor. If elections with their elaborate machinery, prescribed legal codes, and judicially enforceable opportunities do not in fact maximize political equality and popular sovereignty for the reasons just outlined (as well as many others), then I do not think it can be seriously argued that the interelection process maximizes these goals to anywhere near the same degree.

Because human organizations rarely and perhaps never reach the limit set by these eight conditions, it is necessary to interpret each of the conditions as one end of a continuum or scale along which any given organization might be measured. Unfortunately there is at present no known way of assigning meaningful weights to the eight conditions. However, even without weights, if the eight scales could each be metricized,[9] it would be possible and perhaps useful to establish some

9. This question is discussed briefly in Appendix B to this chapter.

arbitrary but not meaningless classes of which the upper chunk might be called "polyarchies."[10]

It is perfectly evident, however, that what has just been described is no more than a program, for nothing like it has, I think, ever been attempted. I shall simply set down here, therefore, the following observations. Organizations do in fact differ markedly in the extent to which they approach the limits set by these eight conditions. Furthermore, "polyarchies" include a variety of organizations which Western political scientists would ordinarily call democratic, including certain aspects of the governments of nation states such as the United States, Great Britain, the Dominions (South Africa possibly excepted), the Scandinavian countries, Mexico, Italy, and France; states and provinces, such as the states of this country and the provinces of Canada; numerous cities and towns; some trade-unions; numerous associations such as Parent-Teachers' Associations, chapters of the League of Women Voters, and some religious groups; and some primitive societies. Thus it follows that the number of polyarchies is large. (The number of egalitarian polyarchies is probably relatively small or perhaps none exist at all.) The number of polyarchies must run well over a hundred and probably well over a thousand. Of this number, however, only a tiny handful has been exhaustively studied by political scientists, and these have been the most difficult of all, the governments of national states, and in a few instances the smaller governmental units.

Some will be quick to insist that the differences among particular types of polyarchies, e.g., between nation states and trade-unions, are so great that it is not likely to be useful to include them in the same class. I do not think we have nearly enough evidence for such a conclusion. At any rate, given such a large number of cases to study, in principle it should be possible to answer the question: What are the necessary and sufficient conditions for polyarchies to exist?

Thus we see that the first method of constructing a theory of democracy, the method of maximization described in chapter 1, merges here with what I have called the descriptive method. We started by

10. Appendix D to this chapter suggests a possible classification scheme.

searching for the conditions that would be necessary and sufficient in the real world in order to maximize so far as may be possible popular sovereignty and political equality. We found that we could answer this question by measuring the extent to which the Rule is employed in an organization. But in order to measure the extent to which the Rule is employed, we had to lay down eight more or less observable conditions. These we interpreted first as limits, which we saw to be unattained in the real world and quite probably unattainable; and then we reinterpreted them as ends of eight continua or scales which, it was suggested, might be used in measurements. Now our question must be rephrased as follows: What are the necessary and sufficient conditions in the real world for the existence of these eight conditions, to at least the minimum degree we have agreed to call polyarchy? In order to answer the question, it would be necessary to classify and study a considerable number of real world organizations. Thus we close the circle between the method of maximization and the descriptive method.

V

To carry out this program rigorously is a task far beyond the scope of these essays and quite possibly beyond the scope of political science at the present time. However we can set down some hypotheses for which considerable evidence exists.

To begin with, each of the eight conditions can be formulated as a rule or, if you prefer, a norm. For example, from the first condition we can derive a norm to the effect that every member ought to have an opportunity to express his preferences. It would seem truistic that if all the members of an organization rejected the norms prescribing the eight conditions, then the conditions would not exist; or alternatively, the extent to which polyarchy exists must be related to the extent to which the norms are accepted as desirable. If we are willing to assume that the extent of agreement (consensus) on the eight basic norms is measurable, then we can formulate the following hypotheses, which have been commonplace in the literature of political science:

1. Each of the conditions of polyarchy increases with the extent of agreement (or consensus) on the relevant norm.

2. Polyarchy is a function of consensus on the eight norms, other things remaining the same.[11]

Unfortunately for the simplicity of the hypotheses, consensus possesses at least three dimensions: the number of individuals who agree, the intensity or depth of their belief, and the extent to which overt activity conforms with belief. Nevertheless, it is worth setting out explicitly what may at first sight seem trivial if not purely definitional, for it is a curious and possibly significant fact that despite the hoary respectability of the hypotheses among political scientists, so far as I know, no one has assembled the empirical data necessary for even a preliminary confirmation of their validity. We do have a reassuring amount of quite indirect evidence that agreement on the eight norms is less in, say, Germany than in England, but it seems to me highly arbitrary to leave our crucial hypotheses in such a careless state.

The extent of agreement, in turn, must be functionally dependent upon the extent to which the various processes for social training are employed on behalf of the norms by the family, schools, churches, clubs, literature, newspapers, and the like. Again, if it were possible to measure the extent to which these processes are used, our hypotheses could be stated as:

3. The extent of agreement (consensus) on each of the eight norms increases with the extent of social training in the norm.

4. Consensus is therefore a function of the total social training in all the norms.

It also follows from the preceding hypotheses that:

5. Polyarchy is a function of the total social training in all the norms.[12] As before, the variable "training" is a highly complex one. At a minimum one would need to distinguish favorable or reinforcing, compatible (or neutral), and negative training. It is reasonable to suppose that these three kinds of training operate on members of most if not all polyarchal organizations and perhaps on members of many hier-

11. Appendix E to this chapter raises some questions about treating polyarchy as positive and increasing with both consensus and political activity.

12. For a "Summary of the hypothetical functions relating polyarchy to its preconditions" see Appendix C to this chapter.

archical organizations as well. But very little reliable knowledge seems to exist on this question.[13]

In principle we need not end the chain of relationships with training. Why, one might ask, do some social organizations engage in extensive training in the norms and others in little or none? The answer is apparently lost in the complexities of historical accident, but a useful subsidiary hypothesis suggests itself, namely, that the extent to which training is given in these norms is not independent of the extent of agreement that exists on choices among policy alternatives.[14] It is reasonable to suppose that the less the agreement on policy choices, the more difficult it will be in any organization to train members in the eight norms. For then, although the operation of the rules may confer benefits on some members, it will impose severe restraints on others. If the results are severe for relatively large numbers, then it is reasonable to suppose that those who suffer from the operation of the rules will oppose them and hence resist training in them. Thus:

6. Social training in the eight norms increases with the extent of consensus or agreement on choices among policy alternatives.

From 5 and 6 it follows that:

7. One or more of the conditions of polyarchy increases with consensus on policy alternatives.

Hypothesis 6 suggests, moreover, that the reverse of Hypothesis 4 is also valid. We would expect that the extent to which social training in the norms is indulged in is itself dependent upon the amount of agreement that already exists on the norms. The more disagreement there is about the norms, the more likely it is that some of the means of

13. No doubt the pioneer work here is Plato's *Republic*. In modern times the most ambitious attempt to examine this problem seems to have been that inspired by Charles Merriam, including his own *The Making of Citizens* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931). Cf. also Elizabeth A. Weber, *The Duk-Duks, Primitive and Historic Types of Citizenship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1929).

14. A highly interesting, factual, and speculative examination of consensus on issues as revealed in Elmira, New York, is contained in B. R. Berelson, Paul F. Lazarsfeld, and William N. McPhee, *Voting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954), chap. ix. Indeed, the entire volume is relevant to the empirical study of polyarchy.

social training—the family and the school in particular—will train some individuals in conflicting norms. The relationship between social training and consensus is thus a perfect instance of the hen-and-egg problem. Hence:

8. The extent of social training in one of the eight norms also increases with the extent of agreement on it.

A relationship that gives rise to occasional confusion is that between polyarchy and social diversity. One often hears it said that "democracy requires diversity of opinion." Certainly it is true that diversity of opinion is a fact of human society; in no known society do all members agree on all policies all the time, and this fact makes it necessary that all social organizations possess some means, however primitive, for settling conflicts over goals. The proposition might even be maintained that because some conflict over goals is inevitable in human organizations, polyarchies are necessary to maximize human welfare—if that term could be suitably defined. In the opinion of many people, diversity, up to some ill-defined point, has other values—aesthetic, emotional, and intellectual. It may also be true, as Mill contended, that some diversity of opinion is a necessary condition for rational calculation about alternative policies. But each of these propositions is quite different from the assertion that diversity of opinion, or conflict over goals, is a necessary condition for polyarchy.[15] For if our argument so far is correct, then it cannot be altogether true that polyarchy requires disagreement either about the validity of the eight basic norms or about particular public policies. At any rate, the relationship is not a simple one.

In the United States we have glorified a historic inevitability as a virtue. (I hope that we shall continue to do so.) Yet the glorification of diversity should not be permitted to confuse us about important social relationships. Is there, then, nothing in our traditional viewpoint? What of Madison's often-repeated hypothesis in *The Federalist*, No. 10?

15. The proposition is valid, of course, in the following trivial sense. Human society is necessary for polyarchy. A fundamental characteristic of human societies is conflict over goals. *Ergo.* . . .

Extend the sphere, and you take in a greater variety of parties and interests; you make it less probable that a majority of the whole will have a common motive to invade the rights of other citizens; or if such a common motive exists, it will be more difficult for all who feel it to discover their own strength, and to act in unison with each other.

In order to grapple with this question of the relationship, if any, between diversity and democracy, we need to distinguish carefully between two rather different categories—or, as I prefer to think of them —continua.

(*a*) One is the continuum from agreement to disagreement over goals. Here we must further distinguish between agreement on political goals and on non-political goals. A political goal is any objective which individuals seek to forward or inhibit by means of government action.[16] In Hypotheses 1 to 5 we have, in effect, distinguished two kinds of political goals: the goals embodied in the eight basic norms and policy goals. The argument so far is that polyarchy requires a relatively high agreement on both kinds of political goals.

(*b*) The other is a continuum from autonomy to control. A group is autonomous to the extent that its policies are not controlled by individuals outside the group.

Madison's argument in effect states that a relatively high degree of group autonomy combined with a relatively high degree of disagreement over goals will act as an important limitation on the capacity of any putative majority to control government policy. But if we are concerned, as we are in this essay, with the conditions under which the existence of the Rule may be maximized, we do not find this a very happy answer. Hence we need to reconstruct Madison's argument; and while he would have put the following reconstruction with an elegance, force, and precision that are beyond my powers, I do not believe that he would have disagreed with the analysis.

Let us imagine two groups of individuals. Group A prefers policy *x*

16. I do not want to pursue an endless regression in definitions. In these essays the meaning of "government" can either be accepted as intuitively more or less clear or the following definition can be used, despite its limitations: Government is the group of individuals with a sufficient monopoly of control to enforce orderly settlements of disputes.

to policy y and the other prefers y to x. Now, remembering that the complete social autonomy of a group is (definitionally) identical with the complete absence of control by any outside individuals or groups, if Group A and Group B are completely autonomous with respect to one another on all policies, then no governmental relation exists between them, and hence they cannot be members of the same polyarchy. Given these extreme conditions, no political question will arise because of their disagreement.[17] Conversely, if the members of Groups A and B are autonomous on no choices, including x and y, then, in principle, polyarchy is possible among them, i.e., the Rule may be applied to resolve the question of x or y. Aside from other difficulties that may be imagined, if there is no autonomy and if the disagreement over x and y is very strong—as, for example, in such a question as slavery which goes to the very essentials of social structure and ideology— then, as has been suggested in connection with Hypothesis 4, agreement on and training in the eight basic norms necessary to polyarchy will probably be reduced, perhaps drastically. That is, disagreement plus no autonomy undermines polyarchy.

If, however, the two groups are autonomous with respect to one another, at least on the choice between x and y, then the decision is no longer a political one for which the machinery of polyarchy needs to be employed. It becomes, like religious toleration, a non-political question, and different choices may be compatible with a high degree of agreement on and training in the basic norms necessary for polyarchy. Hence we formulate the following hypothesis:

Beyond some point, the sharper the disagreement over policies within a social organization, and the larger the proportion of individuals involved in the disagreement, the greater the amount of social autonomy required for polyarchy to exist at any given level.

Now the extent of agreement cannot be considered entirely independently of the extent of political activity in an organization. The extent to which some of the conditions for polyarchy—1, 4, and 5—are met is also a measure of the political activity of members, that is, the extent to which they vote in elections and primaries, participate in

17. Under the conditions stated even war is ruled out.

campaigns, and seek and disseminate information and propaganda. Thus by definition:

9. Polyarchy is a function of the political activity of the members.[18]

A good deal is now known about the variables with which political activity is associated; indeed, the next decade should produce a rather precise set of propositions about these relationships. At present we know that political activity, at least in the United States, is positively associated to a significant extent with such variables as income, socio-economic status, and education, and that it is also related in complex ways with belief systems, expectations, and personality structures. We now know that members of the ignorant and unpropertied masses which Madison and his colleagues so much feared are considerably less active politically than the educated and well-to-do. By their propensity for political passivity the poor and uneducated disfranchise themselves.[19] Since they also have less access than the wealthy to the organizational, financial, and propaganda resources that weigh so heavily in campaigns, elections, legislative, and executive decisions, anything like equal control over government policy is triply barred to the members of Madison's unpropertied masses. They are barred by their relatively greater inactivity, by their relatively limited access to resources, and by Madison's nicely contrived system of constitutional checks.

VI

These, then, are some of the relationships that we political scientists need to explore with the aid of our colleagues in other social sciences. That they are only a few of the crucial relationships is hardly contestable. For example, a relationship, even if a complex one, undoubtedly exists between the extent of political equality possible in a society and the distribution of income, wealth, status, and control over organizational resources. Moreover, it is increasingly likely that

18. For an important complexity in this hypothetical function, see Appendix E to this chapter, "A note on the relation between agreement and political activity."

19. Cf. especially B. R. Berelson, P. F. Lazarsfeld, and W. N. McPhee, *op. cit.*; S. M. Lipset *et al.*, "The Psychology of Voting: An Analysis of Political Behavior, *Handbook of Social Psychology* (Cambridge: Addison-Wesley, 1954).

some relationship exists between the extent of polyarchy and the personality structures of the members of an organization; we now speak of authoritarian and democratic personality types, even if our knowledge of these hypothetical types and their actual distribution in different societies is still highly fragmentary. It is too early to say, I think, that a high correlation has been established between polyarchy and the relative presence or absence of particular personality types; but certainly the efficacy of social training in the basic norms, mentioned above, must partly depend upon the deepest predispositions of the individual.

Because concern with the social prerequisites of different political orders is as old as political speculation, no claim can be made for the novelty of the hypotheses in this chapter. I have simply set forth, sometimes more rigorously than is customary, a body of propositions hinted at, suggested by, inferred from, and often enough openly stated by various political scientists from Socrates to the present. Nevertheless, it may be useful to distinguish this approach, if only in degree, from the Madisonian and populistic.

Madison's compromise between the power of majorities and the power of minorities rested in large part, although not wholly, upon the existence of constitutional restraints upon majority action. As distinguished from Madisonianism, the theory of polyarchy focuses primarily not on the constitutional prerequisites but on the social prerequisites for a democratic order. The difference is one of degree: Madison, as we saw, was not indifferent to the necessary social conditions for his non-tyrannical republic. But surely it is not unfair to say that his primary concern was with prescribed constitutional controls rather than with the operating social controls, with constitutional checks and balances rather than with social checks and balances. After all, the Constitutional Convention had to design a constitution; it could not design a society. The men at the Convention took human nature and social structure largely for granted; their job, as they interpreted it, was to create a constitution most fully consonant both with human nature and social structure and with the goal of a republic

respectful of natural rights, particularly the natural rights of the well-born and the few.

Yet the bent given to American thought by the Constitutional Convention and the subsequent apotheosis of its product have, I believe, hindered realistic and precise thinking about the requirements of democracy. It is significant that right up until Fort Sumter fell, the dispute between North and South was, with only a few important exceptions, cast almost entirely in the language of constitutional law. The tragedy of the Dred Scott decision was not so much its outcome as the state of mind it bespoke.

Because we are taught to believe in the necessity of constitutional checks and balances, we place little faith in social checks and balances. We admire the efficacy of constitutional separation of powers in curbing majorities and minorities, but we often ignore the importance of the restraits imposed by social separation of powers. Yet if the theory of polyarchy is roughly sound, it follows that in the absence of certain social prerequisites, no constitutional arrangements can produce a non-tyrannical republic. The history of numerous Latin-American states is, I think, sufficient evidence. Conversely, an increase in the extent to which one of the social prerequisites is present may be far more important in strengthening democracy than any particular constitutional design. Whether we are concerned with tyranny by a minority or tyranny by a majority, the theory of polyarchy suggests that the first and crucial variables to which political scientists must direct their attention are social and not constitutional.

Populistic theory as it was outlined in the last chapter was found to be formal and axiomatic but lacking in information about the real world. To say that perfect attainment of political equality and popular sovereignty is, by definition of terms, consistent only with the majority principle is not to enunciate a wholly useless proposition, but neither is it very helpful. For what we desperately want to know (if we are concerned with political equality) is what we may do to maximize it in some actual situation, given existing conditions.

If we wish to turn our attention to the chaos of the real world with-

out getting totally lost in meaningless facts and trivial empiricism we need theory to help us order the incredible and baffling array of events. The theory of polyarchy, an inadequate, incomplete, primitive ordering of the common store of knowledge about democracy, is formulated in the conviction that somewhere between chaos and tautology we shall be able sometime to construct a satisfactory theory about political equality.

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER 3

A. The definitional characteristics of polyarchy

Polyarchy is defined loosely as a political system in which the following conditions exist to a relatively high degree:

During the voting period:
1. Every member of the organization performs the acts we assume to constitute an expression of preference among the scheduled alternatives, e.g., voting.
2. In tabulating these expressions (votes), the weight assigned to the choice of each individual is identical.
3. The alternative with the greatest number of votes is declared the winning choice.

During the prevoting period:
4. Any member who perceives a set of alternatives, at least one of which he regards as preferable to any of the alternatives presently scheduled, can insert his preferred alternative(s) among those scheduled for voting.
5. All individuals possess identical information about the alternatives.

During the postvoting period:
6. Alternatives (leaders or policies) with the greatest number of votes displace any alternatives (leaders or policies) with fewer votes.
7. The orders of elected officials are executed.

During the interelection stage:
8.1. Either all interelection decisions are subordinate or executory to those arrived at during the election stage, i.e., elections are in a sense controlling
8.2. Or new decisions during the interelection period are governed by the preceding seven conditions, operating, however, under rather different institutional circumstances
8.3. Or both.

B. The measurement of polyarchy

In order to arrive at a set of scales with which to measure polyarchy quantitatively, each of these conditions may be considered as designating

certain actions the frequency of which can, in principle, be determined. If frequencies can be determined then we may convert the conditions either into statements about past frequencies, say, along a scale from 0 to 100, or about expected future frequencies, that is, probabilities ranged along a scale from 0 to 1.

Thus the first condition can be converted into the statement that polyarchy is a function of the following variable: The fraction of the total membership who perform (or alternatively, the probability that any randomly selected member will perform) the act we assume to constitute an expression of preference among the scheduled alternatives. (This fraction can be designated as P_1.) It happens, however, that the first condition is most amenable to this treatment, for excellent data exist in most organizations on the extent of participation in voting, the act which ordinarily, no doubt, would be used as the index of preference. Unfortunately, however, as we proceed down the list a number of difficulties present themselves. For some conditions our knowledge is not, as in the case of elections, already in quantitative form nor is it likely to be; we have no frequency tables, for example, for Condition 7, and it is clear that formidable problems would arise in the attempt to determine such frequencies. In these cases frequencies or probabilities might have to be assigned by the observer in an intuitive and rather arbitrary way. Moreover, some of the conditions are complex ones and would be meaningless if their ordering were to ignore these complexities. For example, in Condition 2 we would want to take into account more than the frequency with which, or the probability that, some votes or voters will be weighted more than others. Until recently in Great Britain, about 375,000 people had an extra vote (either because they held a university degree or because they had business premises in a constituency different from their residence). Hence Condition 2 was certainly violated at every election; but it was a relatively minor violation if we consider the magnitude of the electorate, for in 1945 those with extra votes were only about 1.2 per cent of the total electorate. What this suggests, however, is that we would want a measure of Condition 2 to take into account both the proportion of votes or voters weighted excessively and the comparative weights. It might be possible to design a scale to take these factors into account, though it is worth mentioning that out of a half-dozen or so which initially seemed to me promising, all proved to be defective in one way or another. The best might be something like the following:

$$P_2 = 1 - \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{K} (\overline{W} - W_i) \, N_i}{\sum_{i=1}^{K} W_i N_i},$$

where W is the weight of the vote, N is the number of citizens or voters with that particular vote, and $\overline{W}$ is the mean weighted vote. This formula would give values approaching 0 as the magnitude of the deviations increased and equaling 1 in the case where all citizens had votes of equal weight. In the British case, mentioned above, the result would be about 0.98.

Conditions 4 and 5 are perhaps even more formidable, for while it is easy enough to detect the gross presence or absence of these conditions, to order the different possible, and indeed probable, states of affairs along the continuum will present numerous problems; needless to say, to impose a metrical scale on any such ordering would be even more difficult—if not, indeed, ludicrous.

C. *Summary of the hypothetical functions relating polyarchy and its preconditions*

The specific shape of the following functions is not known, except that the dependent variable is assumed to be a positive and increasing function of the independent variable when all other factors are fixed. Hence, let $\uparrow$ signify this relation.

(1) $P_1 \uparrow C_1$ when P_1 is one of the definitional characteristics of polyarchy and C_1 is the consensus on the relevant norm.

$$P_2 \uparrow C_2$$
$$\cdots\cdots$$
$$P_8 \uparrow C_8$$

(2) $P \uparrow (C_1, C_2 \ldots C_8, X)$, where X is all other preconditions on which polyarchy is dependent.

(3) $C_1 \uparrow S_1$, where S_1 is social training in that norm.

$$C_2 \uparrow S_2$$
$$\cdots\cdots$$
$$C_8 \uparrow S_8$$

(4) $C \uparrow (S_1, S_2 \ldots S_8, X)$

(5) $P_1 \uparrow S_1$, etc.,

$$\text{and } P \uparrow (S, X)$$

(6) $S \uparrow Ca$, where Ca is consensus on policy alternatives.

(7) $P \uparrow Ca$

(8) $S_1 \uparrow (Ca, C_1)$

$$S_2 \uparrow (Ca, C_2)$$
$$\cdots\cdots\cdots$$
$$S_8 \uparrow (Ca, C_8)$$
$$\text{and}$$
$$S \uparrow (Ca, C_1, C_2 \ldots C_8)$$

(9) $P\uparrow(A, X)$, where A is political activity.

(10) $P\uparrow(Ca, C_{1-8}, S, A, X)$

D. A possible classification of polyarchies

1. Polyarchies are defined as: organizations in which all eight conditions are scaled at values equal to or greater than 0.5.

1.1. Egalitarian polyarchies are defined as: polyarchies in which all eight conditions are scaled at values equal to or greater than 0.75.

1.2. Non-egalitarian polyarchies are defined as all other polyarchies.

2. Hierarchies are defined as: organizations in which all eight conditions are scaled at values less than 0.5.

2.1. Oligarchies are defined as: hierarchies in which some conditions are scaled at values equal to or greater than 0.25.

2.2. Dictatorships are defined as: hierarchies in which no conditions are scaled at values equal to 0.25.

3. Mixed polities are defined as: the residual, i.e., organizations in which at least one condition is scaled at a value greater than or equal to 0.5, and at least one at a value less than 0.5.

E. A note on the relationship between agreement and political activity

So far as I am aware, very little reliable knowledge exists on the relationship between agreement and political activity and therefore on the relationship of the variables of hypotheses (2), (7), and (10) above. Francis Wilson has argued, in effect, that political activity tends to be inversely related to agreement on policy alternatives.[20] Symbolically:

(11) $A\uparrow\text{-}Ca$

From which it would follow, if our hypothesis (9) is correct, that

(12) $P\uparrow\text{-}Ca$

But clearly (7) and (12) cannot be true, for polyarchy cannot both increase and decrease with the extent of consensus over the total range.

V. O. Key has, I think, demonstrated that Wilson's hypothesis is not supported by such empirical evidence as we now have; and that, indeed, the converse might be maintained with as much or better reason. Thus we cannot reasonably argue that consensus is less in New Zealand, where 90 per cent of the adult population frequently goes to the polls in national elections, than in the United States, where 50–60 per cent vote.

Nevertheless, it is not unreasonable to suppose that within a given nation or other social organization there is over time some discernible association between the extent of political activity and the extent of disagreement on

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20. "The Inactive Electorate and Social Revolution," *Southwestern Political Science Quarterly*, XVI, No. 4 (1936), 73–84, cited in V. O. Key, *Politics and Pressure Groups* (3d ed.; New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1952), p. 58.

policy alternatives. In a hypothetical situation where only two alternatives are perceived the simplest case would be one like the following:
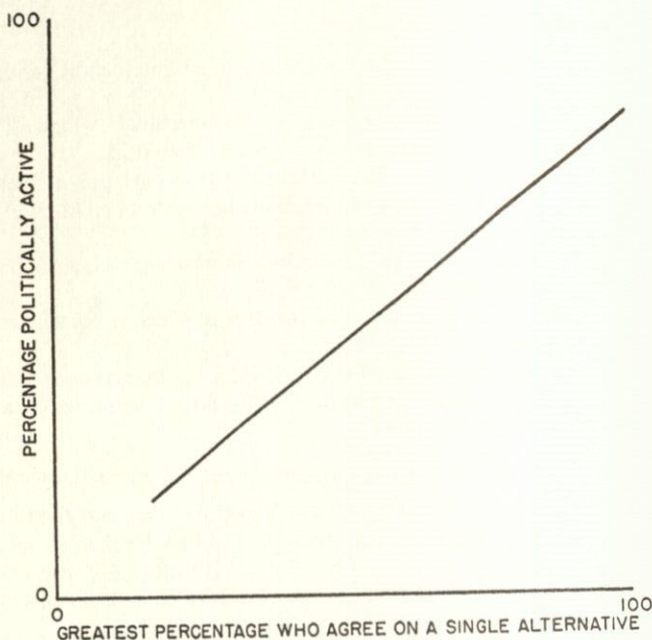

Of course the straight line is arbitrary; so long as the slope of the curve is always positive, any increase in consensus or any increase in political activity must be associated with an increase in polyarchy. Now, it is reasonable to suppose that where consensus is very low, that is, where there is little agreement on any alternative, and hence great difficulty in achieving any alternative, apathy may result. Likewise, it is reasonable to suppose that where consensus is very high, many individuals will feel little need to vote or otherwise to influence political decisions. If these suppositions were correct, then we would expect, up to some point, activity to rise with increasing agreement and thereafter to decline, as in the following diagram.

From A to B no problem arises. From B to C, however, political activity decreases as agreement on policy increases. But decreasing political activity means that the values of P_1, P_4, and P_5 would decline, i.e., polyarchy would decrease. Yet according to hypothesis (7) polyarchy would tend to increase.

If we had sufficient data the contradiction could probably be resolved. In the first place, we could then specify the domains within which the various functions apply. In the second place, we could introduce the time factor, which is ignored in the hypotheses but is undoubtedly of crucial im-

portance. Thus an increase or decrease in agreement may only slowly show up in increased or decreased social training, whereas it may show up in political activity much more quickly. Finally, we could determine whether the relationships are reversible; they need not be. An increase in agreement may not decrease political activity by as large an amount as an equivalent decrease in agreement will increase it. Here the problems of empirical knowledge are formidable and quite possibly insoluble in any except very loose form.
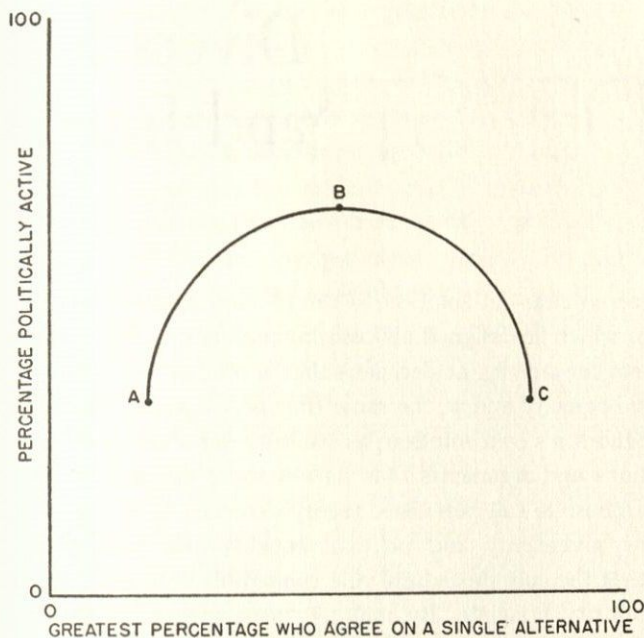
The same difficulties apply to the relationship between polyarchy, political activity, and consensus on the basic norms. But here we may encounter an added problem, for current evidence suggests that in the United States the lower one's socioeconomic class, the more authoritarian one's predispositions and the less active politically one is likely to be. Thus if an increase in political activity brings the authoritarian-minded into the political arena, consensus on the basic norms among the politically active certainly must be declining. To the extent that consensus declines, we would expect from hypothesis (1) that, after some lag, polyarchy would also decline.

In the light of all this we cannot assume that an increase in political activity is always associated with an increase in polyarchy, as indicated in hypothesis (9). The relationship is evidently a highly complex one; it needs a great deal more careful research and theory construction.