

WHY THE STATE WAS DROPPED IN THE  
FIRST PLACE: A PREQUEL TO SKOCPOL'S  
"BRINGING THE STATE BACK IN"

*ABSTRACT: Around the time of World War II, just as the American state was acquiring new levels of capacity for autonomous action, the state was dropped from American social science, as part of the reaction to the rise of totalitarianism. All traces of state autonomy, now understood as "state coercion," were expunged from the image of American democracy. In this ideological climate, the "society-centered" frameworks of pluralism and structural-functionalism that Skocpol criticizes swept the field. Skocpol's call for a return to a Weberian understanding of the (potential) autonomy of government administrators may be complemented by a Weberian understanding of the (potential) autonomy of democratic leaders.*

Theda Skocpol began her famous programmatic essay, "Bringing the State Back In," by noting the short shrift "the state" had received at the hands of American social scientists in the 1950s and 60s, especially those working within the pluralist and structural-functionalist paradigms then dominant in political science and sociology. This cohort of social scientists had neglected in particular the "Weberian" point that organs of the state enjoy a measure of "autonomy" from the surrounding society that enables them to pursue policies and goals distinct from, and even at odds with, those demanded by society and its organized groups. They also neglected the "Tocquevillian" point that

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the structure and activity of a state influence the kind of external demands made upon it, as well as the structures of the groups and classes that make these demands (Skocpol 1985, 28).

Skocpol (1985, 6) argued further that inattention to state autonomy in the 1950s and 60s was not an historical aberration, but consonant with “proclivities present from the start in the modern social sciences.”

These sciences emerged along with the industrial and democratic revolutions of Western Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Their founding theorists quite understandably perceived the locus of societal dynamics—and of the social good—not in outmoded, superseded monarchical and aristocratic states, but in civil society, variously understood as “the market,” “the industrial division of labor,” or “class relations.”

There was, as Skocpol noted, plenty of evidence of state autonomy for social scientists to draw upon—colonial conquest, world wars, state-building revolutions, and political authoritarianism, for example. Indeed, in light of their own national histories, Continental Europeans, especially Germans, had “insisted on the institutional reality of the state and its continuing impact on and within civil society” (7). However,

as long as capitalist and liberal Britain, and then capitalist and liberal America, could plausibly be seen as the unchallengeable “lead societies,” the Western social sciences could manage the feat of downplaying the explanatory centrality of states in their major theoretical paradigms—for these paradigms were riveted on understanding modernization, its causes and direction. And in Britain and America, the “most modern” countries, economic change seemed spontaneous and progressive, and the decisions of governmental legislative bodies appeared to be the basic stuff of politics. (*Ibid.*, 6.)

This is an insightful reading of the history of Western social science, at least in broad outline. While it may be unfair to accuse the pluralists and structural-functionalists of completely neglecting state autonomy, since they did emphasize the role of the state in totalitarian and economically developing countries, it is true that they minimized its autonomy in the Western democracies, and they thought of a minimally autonomous state as a norm toward which other societies ought to aspire. While Skocpol’s general history of Anglophone social science passes over any number of important British theorists who cut against the grain, from

Hobbes and Burke to the British Idealists and Hobhouse, hers is a fair rendering of the mainstream of British social science. And many European social scientists have indeed used the United States as a silver screen on which to project their image of the future, in which the absence of an autonomous state apparatus has been a persistent feature.

But the same cannot be said of American social scientists themselves, at least prior to World War II. Although many did see the United States in the vanguard of history, they certainly did not see it evolving into a “stateless” society, nor even into a society in which the state would be a marionette that moved its limbs only in response to the tug of external interests. Rather, American social scientists were drawn to German, state-centered frameworks from the very beginning. Thousands of the brightest and most ambitious American college graduates traveled to Germany in the final decades of the nineteenth century to pursue advanced studies in (what we would label today as) the areas of political science, economics, law, history, and sociology (Herbst 1965; Parrish 1967). The Americans were impressed not only by the high social status of German academics, but by their close connection to the state, both as advisors and as trainers of civil servants. They brought back from Germany both the state-centered thought patterns of the German Historical School and the ambition to institute a professional civil service on the German model, along with a network of graduate schools to train young men for this service.<sup>1</sup> Their intention to revolutionize American higher education was ultimately more successful than their aspiration to revolutionize American government; their graduates were more likely to find positions as university teachers, journalists, and social workers than as government servants; but “they kept alive the idea of a professional government service as part of the broader campaign for a trained leadership class” (Ross 1991, 70). Indeed, as we will see, the passage of time only increased their interest in the autonomy of the state, as they gave up on achieving social reform by directly educating the voting public and looked instead to possibilities for “social control” through the expert guidance of public affairs.

Of course, the importance of Skocpol’s article lies not in the historical narrative it proffers, but in the analytical approaches it canvasses. Nevertheless, a more accurate rendering of the history of American social science presents us with a puzzle that merits solution: Why, in light of its “statist” beginnings, did the state suddenly drop out of American social science? More precisely, why was the

state's capacity for autonomous action expunged from social-scientific treatments of American democracy? Answering this question advances Skocpol's research program in two ways: it highlights the artificiality of the turn away from the state as autonomous actor; and it draws attention to forgotten resources within the American social-scientific tradition for analyzing and evaluating the activities of states.

### *The Statist Origins of American Social Science*

Opposition to the central state, or "big government," is a deeply rooted American idiom, cultivated by Thomas Jefferson and harvested by Andrew Jackson and his many successors. Of this there is no question. But while parts of America, especially the West, went over to Jackson, the universities remained firmly rooted in Whig political culture, with its predilection for elite guidance in the public interest. This was the soil in which American social science germinated.

The social-science disciplines proper began in an alliance between Whiggish university professors and gentry reformers, or "mugwumps," who sought to replace the corrupt politicians of the Gilded Age with the disinterested leadership of their own class. The American Social Science Association (ASSA), mother to all the more specialized professional organizations, "was founded in 1865 jointly by the scientific and university reformers and by gentry reformers at work in charity organizations, government, and politics" (Ross 1991, 63), with a broadly shared agenda of preserving America's liberal institutions, while reforming and adapting them to cope with the forces of industrialization, urbanization, and, later, immigration. ASSA's offspring, the various specialized social-science organizations, differed on strategy, but all carried forward this basic reformist orientation.

Political science and history were the most "conservative" disciplines, with the closest ties to Eastern Whig political culture and the mugwumps. The guiding spirit of early American political science was that of the German émigré Francis Lieber, the court political theorist of, first, the American Whig party, and then of the Republican party, who defended, in learned systematic treatises, a strong, though limited, national state, led by an aristocracy of merit. Theodore Dwight Woolsey, the president of Yale, and Daniel Coit Gilman, the president of Johns Hopkins, were both major promoters of Lieber's work. Woolsey's student, Andrew White, grabbed the reins

at Cornell University in 1867 and founded a “School of Political Science” that propagated Lieber’s approach (Ross 1991, 67). Among the notable scholars who were inspired by Lieber were Charles Kendall Adams at Michigan, John W. Burgess at Columbia, and Herbert Baxter Adams at Johns Hopkins. All read Lieber, went to Germany to pursue advanced studies in history and *Staatswissenschaft*, and returned to preside over the founding of political-science departments in their respective universities. Their encounter with Lieber, with German historical and governmental science, and with the close relationship between the German universities and the German civil service, only confirmed their native inclinations. As Dorothy Ross (1991, 70) notes of this cohort of political scientists, “the mugwump program to develop a leadership class and an expert civil service was part of their professional as well as their class intention,” which is another way of saying that augmenting the autonomy of the state was their professional and class concern.

These tendencies in academic political science were reinforced by the later stages in the evolution of Progressivism. At first, Progressivism was populist and egalitarian in orientation, and was frequently allied with the Social Gospel movement. Its strategy was, first, to publicize current abuses, so as to inform the popular will; and, second, to institute expanded democratic mechanisms (referendum, recall, and the direct election of Senators and existing legislative bodies) so as to empower the (informed) popular will—which, it was believed, was being stymied by a small economic and legal elite. Its call for greater democratic control was aimed at reducing the influence of “special interests” in government; but of course its strategy implied a reduction in state autonomy as well.<sup>2</sup> Later on, however, Progressivism became more elitist and scientific. This form of Progressivism looked to experts staffing government administrations and agencies to cope with the era’s social problems. While also directed against special interests, its upshot was to insulate the state from the popular will.

It is conventional to use World War I to mark the end of the Progressive era. Progressive hopes that the war experience would generate momentum for national and international “reconstruction” were dashed by the public’s wartime jingoism and its evident desire for a return to “normalcy” after it. But while the war did end the populist strain of progressivism, it encouraged the expert strain. Charles Merriam, the standard-bearer for political science in the 1920s, exemplified the shift.

With the decline of Progressivism and the hysteria of the war years, even traditional Progressives like Merriam came to believe that democratic voters and leaders operated on a psychology of irrationalism. Walter Lippmann . . . turned sharply against the rational capacity of the people. In *Public Opinion* (1922) and *The Phantom Public* (1925), with wide approval among the social scientists, he offered an acid analysis of popular inattention, irrationality, and manipulability. Merriam never adopted Lippmann's harsh language or abandoned democracy. But the old Progressive faith in the educability of the people turned into the need for scientific techniques by which leaders could lead and the public could be trained into accepting the correct path. Science became increasingly a substitute for political prudence. (Ross 1991, 452–53.)

The loss of democratic faith was reflected in the changing nature of expert–Progressive reform proposals. Herbert Croly's *The Promise of American Life* (1909) was a seminal text in the development of expert–Progressivism. Croly's purgative for governmental corruption and incompetence was to concentrate power and responsibility in the hands of political executives, not to disperse or restrict it, as populist–Progressives desired (Croly 1989, 331). The federal structure of government should be retained, but at every level of government—local, state, and federal—the executive, as a public-spirited “Boss” (ibid., 340), should appoint and oversee an administrative staff of “expert public servants” (ibid., 336), removable at his pleasure. Meanwhile legislatures, especially state legislatures, should have their responsibilities streamlined and largely shifted to detail-oriented expert legislative committees, with the primary responsibility for legislative initiatives again coming from the executive (ibid., 315–33). The point was to increase the energy and efficiency of government. But Croly's executives were ultimately accountable to the electorate, and Croly as much as admitted that he had no good answer about what to do when voters elect incompetent and irresponsible executives (ibid., 337).

Despite his recognition of public ignorance, Croly's proposals required, in the end, a public intelligent enough to select wise government leaders. The next phase of expert–Progressivism sought to decouple administration from democratic accountability. It was the heyday of the independent governmental agency. Cass Sunstein (1987, 422–23) has nicely summarized the new mindset:

In the New Deal period, reformers believed that administrative officials would serve as independent, self-starting, technically expert, and apolitical agents of change. This basic understanding wedded the original constitutional belief in the need for an energetic national government to the desire, associated with the Progressive movement, to insulate public officials from partisan pressures in the service of a long-term public interest. The concept of autonomous administration, now under sharp attack, was originally the source of enormous optimism.<sup>3</sup>

A more explicit idealization of state autonomy is difficult to imagine.

### *Economics and Statism*

The story of American political science up to World War II—a story of originary interest in state autonomy reinforced by the evolution of Progressivism—has its analogue in the history of economics. The hegemony enjoyed today by neoclassical economics, with its image of the self-propelling and self-regulating market, should not make us forget its long and losing struggle for converts against more statist rivals in the years prior to World War II. The professionalizing economists of the late nineteenth century were actually the most politically and economically radical of the social scientists, the most sympathetic to Christian and democratic socialism. Frequently of New England Protestant evangelical backgrounds, though sometimes of Midwestern, dissenting Protestant stock, they carried the millennial overtones of religious revivalism into the social sciences, and often joined in loose alliance with the Social Gospel movement on practical reform issues. But despite their radicalism, or because of it, their work pushed them in the same direction as that of the political scientists.

Early organizational leadership was provided by Richard T. Ely, a man of Christian socialist leanings who studied (statist) German historical economics under Wagner and Knies in Germany. In 1885, impressed by the use the historical economists made of the *Verein für Sozialpolitik* to advance their reformist agenda, Ely organized the American Economics Association (AEA) from out of the ASSA. Gathering together sundry opponents of the doctrine of *laissez-faire*—Christian social reformers, economists and political scientists sympathetic to the German school, as well as older critics of social

Darwinism and of classically trained economists—the AEA “issued a nonbinding statement of principles, which approved state economic action, called on economists to turn from the older ‘speculative’ economic methods to historical ones, and named the ‘conflict of labor and capital’ the central problem of modern economics” (Ross 1991, 110). Their organization helped them gain early professional advantage against the older generation of classically trained economists, and Ely’s *Outline of Economics* became the most widely used economics textbook until the end of the Second World War (*ibid.*, 409). Theodore Roosevelt, for one, claimed to have learned his economics from it (Ely 1938).

It should be noted that the demands of professionalization produced a fair amount of irenicism early on, and for a period the technical prowess and pedagogical advantages of the marginalist revolution in economist theory brought neoclassicism into the ascendant. Ely’s textbook itself, repeatedly revised over its many editions, inched in a neoclassical direction, especially under the editorial assistance of Allyn Young.<sup>4</sup> But the apparent success of national economic planning during World War I, followed by the seeming failure of the market in 1929, brought back a new wave of state-centered economic thinking, mostly under the rubric of “institutionalism.” As Lionel Robbins wrote in 1932, “in recent years, if [the institutionalists] have not secured the upper hand altogether, they have certainly had a wide area of power in America.” Even those who maintained formal allegiance to classicism and neoclassicism accepted much of the institutionalist research agenda. As one commentator noted on the eve of American entry into World War II, theoretical discussion among economists was being dominated by the issues of macroeconomic crisis, monopoly, and planning. Whatever regard they officially maintained for Smith’s “invisible hand,” “judged by their choice of topics, economists seem to have given up any implicit unquestioning belief in the virtues of *laissez-faire*, and to some extent, even in the capitalist system” (Roll 1940, 448).

Unlike Marxists, who see the state eventually withering away; and unlike the neo-Marxist students of the state mentioned by Skocpol, who, while abandoning the notion of a stateless communist millennium, continue to see the state as an instrument of class domination or an arena of class struggle, the historical and institutional economists envisioned the state as a permanent feature of a mature capitalist economy, and as oriented toward the public good under the guidance



of economic experts. This matched the evolution of Progressive thought, as hopes that the problems of industrialization and economic inequality could be solved simply by eliminating the “curse of bigness” gave way to a recognition that, in order to capture the productivity of new technology, corporate bigness would have to be tolerated, while its downsides could be moderated by a countervailingly large government exercising regulatory and redistributive functions.

### *Social and Legal Control*

All the social-science disciplines were using the language of social control by the 1920s, but it was the sociologists who first gave the notion currency, and the evolution of its meaning within sociology is illustrative of the larger trends. Edward A. Ross’s *Social Control* (1901) did much to bring the term into widespread use throughout the social sciences. In fleshing out the notion, Ross, an economist turned sociologist, laid emphasis upon the multifarious and inadvertent socializing mechanisms (family, custom, church, schools, discussion, science, etc.) that bent individual feelings and ideas toward the social interest, thereby helping solve the problem of social order. But Ross also mixed in a more instrumentalist meaning of “social control” that was gaining usage among social reformers advocating the public control of private capitalist monopolies, on the one hand, and on the other hand sociologists interested in using their new science to direct social reforms (Dorothy Ross 1991, 236 and 249).

Recognizing the controversial nature of such instrumental knowledge in a democratic society, Ross warned that

the secret of order is, therefore, not to be bawled from every housetop. . . . The social investigator . . . will venerate the moral system too much to uncover its nakedness. He will speak to men, not to youth. He will address himself to those who administer the moral capital of society; to teachers, clergymen, editors, lawmakers, and judges, who wield the instruments of control; to poets, artists, thinkers, and educators, who are the guides of the human caravan. (Quoted in Dorothy Ross 1991, 251.)

The instrumentalist meaning of social control was still subordinate in Ross’s 1901 work. But the same democratic disappointments that transferred the hopes of political scientists to experts also shifted the empha-

sis of sociologists from diffuse, unconscious forms of social control to centralized, conscious versions. The image of a diffuse “moral-educational regime” gave way to a more deliberate, technocratic image of social control by experts acting in and through governmental bodies (Dorothy Ross 1991, 253 and 428–37).

The story unfolded similarly in American legal thought. Critical of the Supreme Court’s practice of striking down, in the name of “freedom of contract” and “fault-based liability,” Progressive legislation such as minimum-wage and maximum-hour laws, collective bargaining by unionized workers, and workers’ compensation, legal realists attacked the formalist (deductive) mode of legal reasoning the Court used to justify its decisions. Judicial discretion, the realists argued, is often present—in the view of the more extreme realists, including Jerome Frank, Herman Oliphant, Hessel Yntema, and Felix Cohen, it is *always* present—in the selection and interpretation of a legal rule to be applied to a given case; and in closing this gap, substantive considerations necessarily come into play, even if unconsciously.

Since the legal realists believed judicial discretion to be inevitable, their complaint was not that the Court was using it, but that it was using it to advance reactionary politics rather than the public weal, as this might be fathomed from social scientists’ analysis of social problems. Over time, the realists’ deference to social science turned into a call for judges to themselves serve as what Roscoe Pound, the Harvard Law School dean (who founded legal realism’s forerunner, “sociological jurisprudence”), called “social engineers.”

Felix Frankfurter, the imposing legal scholar and future Supreme Court justice, followed in Pound’s footsteps. A fellow traveler of the legal realists, Frankfurter’s early realism, like that of so many others, was fired by the hope that exposing the element of freedom in judicial decision making would encourage judges to look to scientifically trained experts for guidance. By the 1930s, however, Frankfurter began to think of the ideal judge as himself an expert, and imagined for him a remarkably elevated role in America’s constitutional democracy—the role of “judicial statesman.” “In simple truth,” he wrote, “the difficulties that government encounters from law do not inhere in the Constitution. They are due to the judges that interpret it. . . . That document has ample resources for imaginative statesmanship, if judges have imagination for statesmanship” (quoted in Silverstein 1984, 80).

By the 1930s, then, all the social sciences were looking to disinter-

ested political leadership and scientific expertise—in short, to state autonomy—as the answer to the multi-sided crisis of American democracy. Moreover, starting in the First World War, and much more so during the New Deal and World War II, American social scientists became part of the autonomous state themselves, helping staff the mushrooming governmental agencies that undertook massive programs of employment, information collection and dissemination, materials procurement, rationing, strategizing, and a host of other activities, all in the name of the national interest. If organized interest groups had some influence over how these programs were implemented, they were but backseat drivers compared to the combined forces of executive leadership and independent agency planning.

Therefore it is all the more striking that by mid century, after several generations of increasing interest among American social scientists in the possibilities of autonomous state action, and precisely when the reality of state autonomy should have been most glaringly obvious to American social scientists—because they were surrounded by its activities as never before, and indeed were themselves often a part of it—American social scientists abandoned the topic. It is as if a long period of accelerating speciation ended suddenly in a mass extinction.

There is no evidence that the dearth of state-centered studies in the postwar period was the result of a grand conspiracy on the part of American social scientists to conceal their newfound power in the halls of government. Rather, the rise of “totalitarianism” seems to have been the cataclysmic event that wiped out the many species of “statism.” Faced with the new and increasingly terrifying regimes of Italy, Germany, and the Soviet Union, American intellectuals rallied to the defense of American democracy by invidiously comparing it to totalitarianism. As a result, the autonomy of the “democratic state” was dropped from view.

### *The Ideological Reaction against Totalitarianism*

Even before the military engagements of World War II had begun, intellectuals in the liberal democracies had formulated their practical opposition to fascism, Nazism, and Communism in terms of a political antithesis. First, they cobbled together a new category of political regime—“totalitarianism”—designed to capture an essence common to

the new European states. Then they reinterpreted democracy as its polar opposite. Totalitarianism became the photographic negative that fixed, and in many respects continues to fix, the self-image of the Western democracies.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the European origins of both the term totalitarianism, and the phenomena it means to capture, nowhere did the concept of totalitarianism receive as wide circulation, or take on as much significance, as in the United States. Indeed, the dichotomy between individual freedom and totalitarianism has arguably been the ruling dichotomy of postwar public discourse. Just as “Jacobinism” was invoked in the nineteenth century to ward off the excesses of individualism, “fascism” has been invoked to scare off restraints on opinion, and “communism” (the other face of totalitarianism) has been invoked to scare off restraints on freedom of contract. The net effect has been to swing American public discourse in a strongly (albeit unrigorously) libertarian direction.

For example, in economics, the definition of Americanism as the polar opposite of fascism and communism gave laissez-faire conceptions of economic order a new lease on life. As fate would have it, Hitler and Roosevelt rose to power in the same year—a fact that encouraged comparison of their programs for economic recovery. Predictably enough, critics of New Deal economic programs began to denounce Roosevelt as a would-be totalitarian dictator (Lifka 1988, chs. 1–2). Of course, there had always been resistance, especially in business quarters, to greater public control of the economy, but among intellectuals, and even among neoclassical economists, there had been growing sympathy toward experimentation with a variety of state economic controls, even while full-blown socialism was avoided. But the fear of totalitarianism became the great simplifier. The dichotomous thinking of the age brought into circulation the extreme position of Hayek and other émigrés from the Austrian school of economics, who argued that any economic control by the state must, through an inexorable social logic, eventuate in totalitarian control of the whole society. It was all or nothing. While these views were at the outer edge of American opinion, Americans almost without exception, including most former Progressives, emerged from the war with a much more sympathetic view of private property and “free” enterprise (Skotheim 1971, ch. 4). It was the ideological opposition between free and totalitarian economies, more than any great failure of American economic planning during wartime, that brought

an end to American flirtation with forms of economic corporatism and syndicalism. At the same time, the schools of economics—neo-Marxist, historical, and institutionalist—that had once advocated corporatism and syndicalism were marginalized.

The opposition to totalitarianism also led to the rediscovery of America's civil liberties tradition (which, it is usually forgotten, had been eclipsed by the nineteenth-century apotheosis of majority rule, by the common law's defense of local "police powers," and by the Progressive emphasis on the public interest over individual interests).<sup>6</sup> In response to the totalitarian tar brush just described, defenders of Roosevelt's economic programs, including Roosevelt himself, while rejecting the imputation that they were imposing totalitarian economic controls, searched for a different plane on which to contrast American democracy and totalitarianism. What they seized upon were civil liberties. If fascism meant state control of mass communication, America stood for freedom of speech and of the press; if fascism meant persecution of religion, America stood for freedom of religion; if fascism meant the restriction of public gatherings and of the movement of peoples, America stood for freedom of association and freedom of movement. And the most challenging contrast of all: if fascism meant racism, America stood for racial and ethnic harmony and cooperation.

These values, always more prominent in the writings of European classical liberals and radicals than in the practice of American democracy, were now touted as the very essence of America. Expressive of this change, in 1941 the Roosevelt administration celebrated with great fanfare the 150th anniversary of the Bill of Rights—an anniversary that had gone unremarked in 1841 and 1891 (Foner 1998, 163 and 217). Shortly thereafter, the Supreme Court, now dominated by Roosevelt men, began to issue opinions (themselves saturated with the freedom/totalitarianism dichotomy) "incorporating" the Bill of Rights through the Fourteenth Amendment, so that its protections would apply not just against the actions of the federal government, but those of state governments as well.

In addition to structuring public rhetoric, the freedom/totalitarianism dichotomy—or a common variant of it, the democracy/totalitarianism dichotomy—was adopted by a broad range of American social scientists and legal scholars as an analytic framework for the classification and evaluation of governmental systems, social systems, even entire "cultures."<sup>7</sup> From the late 1930s through the 1960s especially,

these dichotomies structured reflection about politics, economics, law, psychology, education, foreign affairs, and most every other domain of social life.

*“Totalitarianism” vs. “Democracy”*

In tracing the impact of totalitarianism upon the social sciences, and political science in particular, two developments are of central importance. One, which can be treated quite quickly, is the emergence of the democracy/totalitarianism dichotomy as the organizing principle for discussion of political systems, and for comparative work in particular.

The systematic, empirical comparison of governmental systems was a latecomer to American political science, probably on account of the lingering influence of natural-law frameworks. When textbooks in comparative government did begin to appear, in the early 1930s, they provided little in the way of theoretical integration, with individual chapters devoted to separate nations in no particular order. The advent of totalitarianism gave impetus to comparative work, and at the same time gave it its organizing principle. By the late 1930s, comparativists, particularly European émigrés, had developed a synthetic concept of totalitarianism, describing what was common among communism, fascism, and Nazism, as well as what distinguished these regimes from traditional forms of dictatorship. Especially important for the development of this synthesis was a focus on the similarity of *means* employed by the dictatorships of the Left (Communism) and Right (fascism and Nazism), and the notion that these new regimes were qualitatively different from dictatorships of the past in their employment of modern technologies of communication and control. By the end of the decade, typical textbooks used chapters on Italy, Germany, and the Soviet Union to contrast “totalitarianism” with Western democracies (Lifka 1988, 22 and 102).

The precise content of this contrast varied over time, however, which brings us to the second development of central importance to postwar political science: the transformation of the ideal of value-neutral science into the ideal of a value-neutral, noncoercive political-constitutional order. To impose values is absolutist and totalitarian; the only legitimate authority, by contrast, is one that provides a neutral framework for the brokering of value-claims, or “interests.” Legitimate authority is relativistic by virtue of being democratic. This was

the version of the democracy/totalitarianism dichotomy that pushed the autonomy of the “democratic” state into hiding, and that carried the antistatist paradigms of pluralism and structural-functionalism to their position of dominance.

### *Democracy and the American Methodenstreit*

To understand the genesis and appeal of the value-neutral political-constitutional ideal, we must turn to the academic debates of the 1930s and 40s over scientific methodology and democratic values. The charged intellectual atmosphere in the American academy during these years has been wonderfully reconstructed by Edward Purcell in a neglected classic, *The Crisis of Democratic Theory* (1973). As Purcell shows, totalitarianism overtook Europe and Asia at a time when American academics were deeply divided over methodology in the social sciences and jurisprudence. On one side stood “scientific naturalists,” including the younger generation of legal realists, who, whether under the influence of neo-Kantianism, positivism, or Darwinism, rejected the idea that ethical propositions could be rationally demonstrated, and who advocated replacing such exercises with empirical, “value-free” studies of the way in which politics, the law, and other social phenomena “really work.” Squared off against them were “rational absolutists” such as Robert Maynard Hutchins, Mortimer Adler, and numerous Catholic intellectuals, who, as part of a renaissance of Thomism and natural-law theory, held that human reason could discover universal principles of justice through philosophical analysis of the nature of reality. The rise of fascism brought this methodological quarrel to a head by convincing each side that the fate of Western democracy depended upon routing its methodological opponent.

Initially, it was the scientific naturalists who found themselves on the defensive. This is hardly surprising when it is recollected that many of them, and perhaps Walter Lippmann preeminently, had spent the 1920s and early 30s reducing traditional democratic theory to a shambles. As Purcell (1973, 11–12) puts it, in a passage worth quoting at length:

Between the first decade of the twentieth century and the mid-thirties the methods and assumptions of scientific naturalism helped expose major weaknesses in traditional democratic theory. First, it destroyed

rational justifications of ethical ideals, such as a “higher law,” which had provided democratic theory with its moral foundations. In the years after 1910 scientific naturalists strictly confined induction to observable, concrete phenomena and ruled it out as a method of proving the validity of any moral principles. At the same time they sharply redefined the nature of deductive logic, always closely allied with rational ethical systems. By demonstrating its wholly abstract and formal nature, scientific naturalists denied it any authority in questions concerning the legitimacy of moral values. Rejecting the possibility of demonstrating the truth of ethical propositions by either induction or deduction, they left moral ideals without a rational, theoretical basis. Second, in empirically examining human behavior and the actual process of American politics, scientific naturalists came to question and often reject three cardinal principles of democratic government: the possibility of a government of laws rather than of men, the rationality of human behavior, and the practical possibility of popular government itself. Legal scholars began to argue that judicial decisions were not the results of impartial logic but of the personal values of judges. There was no such thing as “established” law. Psychologists found that human behavior was largely irrational, especially in the complicated and emotional arena of politics. Most individuals, they maintained, were unable to fulfill the traditional democratic obligations of the citizen. Students of politics learned that in practice small groups of insiders dominate the government and that popular control was an illusion. Democratic government simply did not work as its theory claimed it should. By the early thirties traditional democratic theory seemed largely untenable.

Most scientific naturalists continued to believe in the desirability of democracy, and some tried to reformulate its theory. But the rise of European totalitarianism and the international political tensions of the late thirties transformed the problem of the validity of democratic theory into an unavoidable and essential question. The disillusionment of some intellectuals with naturalism, the hostility of church groups, and the frustrations created by the depression combined with the rise of Nazism to galvanize many Americans into a renewed attack on scientific naturalism as a destructive and inadequate world view.

The most basic charge leveled at the naturalists was that their work assumed, and intentionally or unintentionally propagated, moral relativism, the logical implication of which was that “that which is, is right”; and that it was on this value skepticism that totalitarianism fed. For neo-Scholastics such as Fr. Francis E. Lucey, regent of the



Georgetown University School of Law, the lines of battle were clear: “Democracy *versus* the Absolute State means Natural Law *versus* Realism” (quoted in Purcell 1973, 168).

### *Relativistic Democracy vs. Absolutist Totalitarianism*

Such rationalist-absolutist polemics by and large accorded with the sentiments of the general public during the war. But within academe, the scientific naturalists were able to turn the tables on the absolutists; and they did so in grand pragmatist style, shifting the terms of debate from the question of the logical implications of a theory to that of its social consequences.

John Dewey (1954 and 1957) had been arguing for decades that democracy was the political correlate of the “experimental attitude” in science.<sup>8</sup> By the late 1930s, he was emphasizing the converse as well—that political absolutism was the practical correlate of philosophical absolutism, since the pretense of eternal verities licensed a caretaker elite (Dewey 1939). The claim resonated, given that most academics carried with them a hazy Enlightenment historical consciousness that associated the “authoritarianism” of the medieval Church with Scholastic “dogmatism,” and that furthermore gave them the vague sense that the advent of modern experimental science had at least something to do with the democratization of the West. Although few adopted Dewey’s optimism that the “experimental method” could found a new science of values, they did rally behind the dichotomy he drew between political and philosophical absolutism on one side and political and philosophical openness on the other.

Totalitarianism, as now construed by the naturalists, was the reflex of moral absolutism: it stood for the imposition, by an individual or group, of one set of values on everyone else. Such a definition allowed scientific naturalists to condemn totalitarianism, and praise democracy, without taking any “substantive” value position. It made totalitarianism objectionable as a *procedure* of governance, regardless of the *content* of the values it imposed—objectionable because, normative proofs being impossible, the imposition of values can never be justified, whatever they are. This viewpoint brought with it a pluralistic interpretation of democracy as the photographic negative of totalitarianism. Democracy is the social form that results from accepting

the relativity of all value positions and is characterized by diversity, change, voluntarism, and compromise.

The result was what Purcell aptly dubs the “relativist theory of democracy,” the central claim of which was that, in the words of Thomas Vernor Smith, “democracy does not require, or permit, agreement on fundamentals” (Smith 1942, 124; quoted in Purcell 1973, 209).<sup>9</sup> Indicative of the new understanding is the *volte face* of Carl J. Friedrich, the eminent constitutional historian and comparativist, who in 1937 was still defending Sir Arthur Balfour’s classic formulation that democracy was possible only where citizens agreed on fundamental values, but who by 1939 suggested that “it seems highly questionable whether fundamental agreement, or the absence of dissent in matters of basic significance is really a necessary or even a desirable condition for a constitutional democracy. . . . May it not be that modern constitutional democracy is the endeavor precisely to organize government in such a way that agreement on fundamentals need not be secured?” (Friedrich 1939, 571–73; quoted in Purcell 1973, 213–14).

The new gospel quickly spread to the four corners of academia. “Democracy then becomes identified with this principle of relativity, as contrasted with the absolutism of dictatorships,” wrote Boyd M. Bode of Ohio State. “There is no middle ground” (Bode 1937, 48; quoted in Purcell 1973, 210). The nondemonstrability of ethical propositions was no longer seen as a logical blow to democracy, but as its pragmatic justification; and democratic relativism now threw jibes at “Adlerian authoritarianism” (Purcell 1973, 203).

Dewey’s equation of philosophical absolutism with political authoritarianism proved the linchpin of the developing relativist theory of democracy because it provided the one basis on which most American intellectuals could unite. It was grounded on a thorough naturalism; it required the acceptance of no specific ethical theory or philosophical system; and, best of all, it claimed that rational and religious absolutism was the real enemy of democracy. In short the absolutist-authoritarian equation appealed to all of the intellectual and emotional convictions of a great number of American scholars and at the same time allowed them to defend both naturalism and democracy by aligning their absolutist critics with European totalitarianism. (Ibid., 202.)

Moral absolutists, it now appeared, were but totalitarians in waiting. Moral skeptics were the true democrats.

In view of their conviction that value disagreements are rationally irresolvable, the new theorists of democracy were more apt to trace their lineage to the “tough-minded” Justice Holmes than to the “tender-hearted” Professor Dewey—hence the tendency to read the neutrality ideal back into Holmes himself. But in truth it was only at the onset of World War II that American intellectuals conjured, as a reverse image of European totalitarianism, a picture of American democracy as shorn of shared value commitments. And what is more, they held this image up as a societal ideal. Stated baldly, an ideal of value-neutral science had been translated into an ideal of a value-neutral political-constitutional order—or at least, of a political-constitutional order in which values are not imposed on anyone.

This was a remarkable piece of ideological thaumaturgy. Max Weber, as an early proponent of value-neutral (*wertfrei*) social science, described value commitments (including his own) as a matter of “faith.” Neither he nor his contemporaries would have dreamed of such a thing as a value-neutral political order. When Weber advocated democracy for Germany, he did so on the ground that it was the political form most likely to select charismatic yet responsible leaders capable of preserving the nation against the disintegrating forces of market competition, and of “elevating” the national character, by winning the public over to a *common* politicocultural faith.<sup>10</sup> Nor was the United States lacking intellectuals in the Weberian mold. Justice Holmes, in particular, spoke of politics as a matter of “fighting faiths.” Yet remarkably, over the course of World War II, American social scientists and legal scholars translated the Weberian ideal of value-neutral science into an ideal of a value-neutral political-constitutional order, and they recast America as the embodiment of this ideal.

On a considered view, this must be judged an overdrawn ideological reaction to the situation in Europe. The horrors of Nazism, for example, came from the content of the values it cultivated (its racism, its militarization of society, its claim to world domination) and from the means it employed to cultivate them (state monopoly of all media, violent elimination of all dissent, denial of the right to exit, etc.), not from its cultivation of values *per se*. The association of values with authoritarianism also forgets that the institutional forms of liberal civilization have classically been justified on account of their capacity to foster various human virtues and secure various human goods.<sup>11</sup> It confuses the classical-liberal dissociation of citizenship from religious confessionalism with disengagement from substantive values (includ-

ing religious values) *in general*. Furthermore, it does not actually follow from value skepticism that the imposition of values is unjustifiable. To conclude so overlooks the other edge of the sword—the edge emphasized by the rational absolutists—that moral skepticism undermines the reasons one might adduce as to why a given set of values *shouldn't* be imposed. If there is no truth about values, then why refuse those offered by the authorities? Put another way, if we are skeptical of all values, then it is not clear why we should accept the *normative* proposition that, lacking proof for a value position, the state *ought not* encourage it. Moral skepticism is consistent with state neutrality, absolutism, or anything in between.

Confused or not, the new neutralist idea of democracy became the guiding light of American intellectuals after the war. As Gary Peller (1988, 585–86) nicely puts it,

In the period immediately after the Second World War, [the relativist theory of democracy] defined for mainstream American intellectuals their roles as intellectuals and, more generally, their conception of the difference between freedom and domination. Within this self-understanding, standing for liberty and freedom against the forces of domination and oppression represented by fascism specifically meant not taking a stand on substantive issues of politics and the distribution of social power. Intellectuals would respect the boundary between knowledge and politics by a steadfast value-neutrality, refusing to privilege one belief structure over another. Through the interpretation that linked European fascism (and later communism) to philosophical absolutism, they imagined that the preservation of liberty and freedom depended on ensuring that no substantive vision of truth or justice would be favored.

The famous postwar debate over the “end of ideology” was indicative of the new outlook. “Ideology” referred to all totalizing (“absolutist”) social philosophies, and the question was whether Americans had succeeded in ridding themselves of them. Whether one believed they had or not, most agreed it would be a good thing.<sup>12</sup>

The debate over totalitarianism carved the broad channel in which all the mainstream intellectual developments of postwar U.S. legal and social scientific thought have run. Paradoxically, it *moralized* the skeptical position that the propagation of one conception of the good over another can never be rationally justified by associating the opposite position, ethical absolutism, with totalitarianism. As Gabriel Al-

mond put it in 1954, “Once involved in the struggle for political power, the ethical absolutist is confronted by the most serious temptation,” the temptation to impose his philosophy by totalitarian means (Almond 1954, 374; quoted in Purcell 1973, 238). At the same time, it *constitutionalized* this skepticism in the conviction that, in a proper liberal polity, the major constitutional arenas—politics, economics, and law—neither impose, nor presuppose, agreement on fundamental values. To quote Friedrich again, “Since certainly dictatorship of the modern totalitarian variety, and perhaps a good many other forms of government require such agreement on fundamentals, constitutional democracy is possibly the only form of government which does not require such agreement” (quoted in Purcell 1973, 214).

This set of intellectual commitments was not shared by all Americans; indeed, its initial carriers were a fairly small group of academic elites. Much of the rest of the country attributed the evils of fascism and communism to their godlessness and retained a more traditional understanding of America as a (Christian, or at least Judeo-Christian) God-fearing nation, with freedoms under moral law.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, the impact of the relativist framework was felt in every area the academic elites touched, and was indirectly propagated in ever-widening circles. Its impact was felt most immediately in a retheorization of the principal social sciences along lines consistent with relativist premises.<sup>14</sup>

### *The Proceduralist State*

The ideal of “state neutrality” is perhaps the most obvious offspring of the relativist framework. Despite widespread opinion to the contrary, state neutrality was not a classical-liberal ideal, but a postwar American intellectual ideal.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, the rise of the neutrality ideal falls outside our present story. It didn’t reach critical mass until the 1970s, and furthermore, it has been the preserve of political philosophy and allied fields and has not produced anything approaching an analytical framework usable for empirical comparative research. But for what it is worth, including it would only confirm our story. Talk of the neutral state may “bring the state back in,” but only after the state has been shorn of all value orientations—which is to say, shorn of all real autonomy. Indeed, the literature on state neutrality has really focused upon

principles of social justice. The state that would be needed to administer them has received almost no attention.

Our story, instead, concerns the new analytic frameworks for empirical research that rose to prominence in the immediate postwar decades in the climate of democratic relativism: democratic (as opposed to value) pluralism and structural-functionalism. These frameworks are best understood as part of a broad intellectual current that swept through American history and social science in the immediate postwar decades as historians and social scientists tried to resolve questions raised by the new relativist understanding of democracy. Perhaps the greatest puzzle was that of social order. Namely, if democratic citizens don't share fundamental value commitments, then what keeps society from falling apart into the war of all against all? How does society go on? "Consensus theory" is the historian's label for a family of postwar social-scientific theories that provided solutions to this puzzle.

The leading assumption of consensus theory was not, as the name might suggest, that democratic citizens agree upon fundamental values, but rather that, despite disagreement on values, Americans agree on the procedures for settling disagreements, and agree to accept as binding the outcome of these procedures. In other words, they enjoy a consensus on the proper means for deciding otherwise irresolvable disputes. Consensus theory thus provides a different, more modest, kind of accommodation to relativist premises than does neutralism. Consensus theory does not demand that public policy be neutral with respect to substantive values (although it does ask that the policy-making process be open to competing value claims, and that political actors generally hold a skeptical attitude toward values, especially toward "totalistic" value systems). Rather, consensus theory accommodates value pluralism by arguing that a society may do without agreement on fundamental values so long as there is a common allegiance to the *process* by which (value-laden) decisions are made. Reason is instrumental—value conflict is not rationally resolvable—but, at least in America, conflict is contained within a consensus on how to carry on when faced with disagreement: through voting, bargaining, compromise, accommodation, and coexistence. It was not even necessary to assume that this consensus had been brought by the majority of Americans to the level of a conscious proceduralist social philosophy that they positively affirm (a proviso that doubtless helped protect the theory from easy falsification). As Harvard political

scientist Benjamin F. Wright put it in 1958, “It was not the consensus of ideology” that Americans enjoyed. “It was rather the consensus rooted in the common life, habits, institutions, and experience of generations” (Wright 1958, 57; quoted in Purcell 1973, 255). This was in keeping with the naturalist emphasis upon the social consequences of ideas—ideas in action—as opposed to their logical implications. In the eyes of consensus theorists, “moral relativism” was not merely a premise in a philosophical argument for democracy. It was a lived reality. What consensus theorists saw when they looked at American society was, in Purcell’s apt gloss, an “institutionalized relativism” characterized by openness, tolerance, and pluralism (Purcell 1973, 211). Ethical relativism thus became, at one and the same time, the philosophical justification for democracy and the empirical foundation of it.

### *The Relativist Defense of Democratic Proceduralism*

The debts of this new theory of American democracy to the wartime debate over totalitarianism and scientific method are deep. American political scientists came out of the debate with their commitment to scientific naturalism intact. Indeed, their commitment was redoubled. Value skepticism, the erstwhile vice of scientific naturalism, had been turned by relativist theory into the central democratic virtue. Those who adopted a “relativistic” attitude toward values were being good democrats at the same time that they were (by virtue of engaging in the rather different project of value-free social science) being good scholars. All “spiritualist” and normative notions such as right, sovereignty, public interest, and legitimacy were dropped, replaced by the neutral language of political process.

To such theorists, America exemplified a society held together without agreement on fundamental values (in particular, without a common *ideology*); what it had instead was a shared democratic “culture.”<sup>16</sup>

On its face, the turn to culture is puzzling, for one normally thinks of a “culture” in just the totalistic terms about which one thinks of an ideology. But the puzzle is solved once one appreciates the *kind* of culture that social scientists, beginning with Dewey, attributed to democracies. Democratic culture, in Dewey’s language, was a “scientific” culture—a “secular,” “skeptical,” “experimental” culture charac-

terized more by common attitudes and habits than by common beliefs. In contrast to other political systems (in particular, in contrast to totalitarianism, which, it was argued, was held together by common adherence to a consciously cultivated ideology), democracy was held together by common adherence to a largely unconscious cultural tradition, understood as a set of shared attitudes and behavioral patterns. In Purcell's words, "Democracy required a kind of unity to endure, but it was a pragmatic, relativist, cultural unity and not a theoretical, ethical, or absolute unity" (Purcell 1973, 215). The notion that democracies were held together by a consensus on procedures, and that this procedural consensus was sustained by a skeptical, relativist, pragmatic, tolerant, "scientific" culture, became a hallmark of postwar political science.

By the same token, the rejection of moralistic, "absolutist" politics as ideological and "totalitarian" implied, by the logic of the democracy/totalitarianism dichotomy, that such politics was undemocratic and un-American. American politics, it now appeared, was—and should be—"practical" and preoccupied with the brokering of mundane "interests." Richard Hofstadter, perhaps the most widely read historian of the 1950s and 60s, exemplified the shift. As a young scholar in the 1930s, he was sympathetic to the Progressive program and the Progressive view of history, especially its emphasis upon the covert influence of economic interests. But by 1948, although retaining the emphasis upon the economic factor, he swept away the Progressive notion that American history was dominated by a broad ideological conflict between Hamiltonians and Jeffersonians, i.e., selfish economic conservatives and public-minded reformers. Rival political camps, it was now emphasized, carried out their struggles within a shared horizon of "capitalist culture."<sup>17</sup> Given Hofstadter's own reform background, he wished to paint a sympathetic portrait of the Progressives. But the force of the democracy/totalitarian dichotomy carried him into criticism. The broad programs for social reform of the populist-Progressives, while high-minded, now seemed overly ideological and utopian. Indeed, an analogy between American populism and the collectivist ideas of America's totalitarian enemies lay just beneath the surface of *The Age of Reform* (1955), even down to details, as when Hofstadter noted the populists' penchant for scapegoating and drew out from their rhetoric a previously undetected and latent anti-Semitism.

As for the expert-Progressives, Hofstadter diminished them, and



the relevance of their ideological commitments, by subjecting them to sociological and psychological analysis. Their interest in reform, and especially in guiding the hand of reform, was not so much a natural outgrowth of deeply held social ideals, but a response to, and compensation for, their loss of power and prestige in the new industrial order. In light of these reevaluations, the resistance put up by the American political system to comprehensive Progressive reform programs now appeared as a sign of health, not dysfunction (Hofstadter 1948; Hofstadter 1955). In a less nuanced version of this position, Daniel J. Boorstin (e.g., 1953), another leading postwar historian, organized his entire narrative of American history around the notion that America has enjoyed such a good run historically precisely because its politics is piecemeal and pragmatic rather than comprehensive and ideological. These historians were among the most important voices for the dissemination of the relativist persuasion among the educated public, but their narratives were really but projections onto the past of an understanding of democracy hammered into shape by social scientists reacting against totalitarianism.<sup>18</sup>

Having reduced all values to “interests,” democratic relativists, in keeping with their renewed commitment to value skepticism, treated all interests as morally equivalent. Accordingly, their analysis of democratic politics shifted away from its normative discourse to the processes by which conflicts of interests were mediated. As Theodore Lowi (1969, 70) notes caustically, “the ends of government and the justification of one policy or procedure over another are not to be discussed, according to the new view. The *process* of formulation is justification in itself.”

### *Democratic Pluralism vs. State Autonomy*

The attention given to interests over ideology, when combined with the assumption of American value pluralism, translated easily into the assumption that the really effective factor in American politics was a plurality of interests organized into groups. Hannah Arendt (1951) in particular had emphasized the deliberate effort of totalitarian regimes to “atomize” their populations, destroying parties, churches, unions, and any other group formation that might foster loyalties, ideas, or interests at odds with the state. By implication, the presence of a rich mosaic of groups and “voluntary associations” was taken as evidence

of a healthy democratic society, even allowing for the tendency of such groups to become “politicized” and press demands upon the government. The early decades of the century had been awash in Progressive journalistic and social scientific exposés of the insidious influence of “pressure groups” and “special interests” on the legislative process. What was new was the widespread sense of the beneficence of these activities, taken as a whole. They were now seen as the primary avenue by which governments become responsive to emerging social needs.

The group approach to American government was not new, at least in broad outline. In the first decades of the twentieth century, Charles Beard and Arthur Bentley both argued for a reorientation of political science toward the study of economic interest groups. Bentley, whose major work in political science was even entitled *The Process of Government* (1908), and who was frequently cited by postwar group theorists, has an especially good claim to being the godfather of postwar pluralist theory. But it is significant that both Beard and Bentley were marginalized by the political science profession during this phase of their work, and they both dropped out of the university system (Ross 1991, 458–67). After the war, however, variants of these theories swept the field. Indeed, for some, the activity of interest groups was part and parcel of the political process. To study the political process was to study societal groups.

The emphasis upon plural groups accorded nicely with the notion that power was dispersed within the American political system. Indeed, having taken note of the diversity of competing interest groups in the United States, and having postulated their preponderant influence in political decision making, it was practically a direct inference that political power would be dispersed. As V. O. Key (1958, 10) put it in his influential writing on the subject, effective power was so dispersed in America that “the locus of power may shift from question to question and even from time to time on the same question.” American society was “pluralist.” Its pluralism of values produced a pluralism of groups, and its pluralism of groups produced a decentralization of power. This, too, provided a sharp contrast with totalitarianism, which was understood to concentrate power in the hands of a single individual (a Hitler or a Stalin).

Carl Friedrich was one who helped accentuate the contrast, in terms directly relevant to the reversal of attitudes toward state auton-

omy. “The state,” Friedrich wrote, in a brief historical introduction to his authoritative treatment of totalitarianism,

was recognized as a new order in the sixteenth century. Jean Bodin more especially formalized its understanding by linking the state with sovereignty. The claim that the ruler of a state must be sovereign, if the state is to epitomize a good order, amounted to claiming that the ruler must be free of all restraints. Jean Bodin did not, in fact, dare to go that far, though some of his more radical formulations do. But Hobbes did and thus completed the doctrine of the modern state.

“The genuine state concept calls for an absolute ruler, an autocrat,” Friedrich concluded. “When seen in this perspective, the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century are the outcome of movements directed against the denigration of the state in the liberal age” (Friedrich and Brzezinski 1965, 6 and 7).<sup>19</sup> After being given such a malodorous pedigree, it is no wonder that the concept of “the state” was erased from descriptions of American democracy, and that state autonomy was abandoned as an ideal. The wider the distribution of political initiative, and the more it came from outside the halls of government, the better.

These shifts in emphasis from state to society were part of a dramatic reappraisal of the merits of existing American institutions and practices. Often, the very same features of American democracy that had attracted the condemnation of Progressives were now counted as blessings. The reappraisal of political pressure groups is only the most obvious example among many. For example, the preponderant influence of special interests, and especially of economic elites, in American governance now seemed benign, even beneficent, because they were both more informed—in this, they replaced social-scientific and judicial experts—and more likely than the masses to evince the skeptical, tolerant, pragmatic spirit necessary to a democracy (an impression greatly reinforced by the experience with McCarthyism). Similarly, American political parties, always short on principles and clear policy positions, were now seen as important nonideological forums for compromise among conflicting interests and classes. Widespread voter apathy now appeared as a valuable counterweight to ideological politics. Even the bosses of the old urban political machines, once denounced as poisonous spiders weaving webs of corruption, were now praised for their integrating function, harmonizing divergent interests and knitting diverse immigrant communities into the fabric of Amer-

ican life. The very same lack of principle that led them to sell offices to the highest bidder and to buy voter loyalty with occasional perquisites was now glossed as evidence of nonideological “moderation” (Herring 1965, 137).<sup>20</sup>

Having defined both the United States and democracy as the polar opposites of totalitarianism, it was a short step to portray existing American practices as definitive of a well-functioning democracy. Thus, while the postwar political scientific literature is filled with normative disavowals—“inquiry into how men ought to act is not a concern of research in political behavior,” wrote David Truman (1951, 37–38; quoted in Ricci 1984, 137)—naturalistic description of how American democracy “really worked” blurred with normative prescriptions of how a modern democracy *ought* to work. What this added up to was the “social conservatism” of which postwar social scientists were so often accused by the generation coming of age in the 1960s. In reality, postwar social scientists were an overwhelmingly liberal cohort, the direct descendants of the Progressives. But the encounter with totalitarianism, and the intellectual framework that emerged from that encounter, did deter advocacy of radical reform. As Purcell (1973, 253) notes, “By the early fifties many, like Boorstin, were equating all broad moral and social theories with ideology, pejoratively used to mean an unrealistic, moralistic absolutism that by its very nature endangered social tranquility. By discrediting ideology and morally based pleas for social change, they tended to equally discredit any call for a significant restructuring of American society.” The very fact that the unity of the nation was understood to rest, not upon a common creed, but upon a common culture—a congeries of rules and behaviors unconsciously followed in everyday interactions—probably tended to magnify fears that dramatic social reconstruction might spark a social meltdown. Widely sympathetic to New Deal causes, and to the cause of African-American civil rights (especially after the confrontation with Hitler’s racial caste system), American social scientists were even more sympathetic to the case for gradualism.

It is worth noting that the shift away from “statism” led to a disavowal of prewar political science on epistemological grounds. The “behavioralism” that social scientists wore on their sleeves after the war was in fact little more than a refurbishing of the scientific naturalism of their immediate predecessors, yet their newly democratic orientation placed them in such a different mental universe that they were apt to

believe the change to be the consequence of a methodological break (rather than the ideological break that it was), and to use this as grounds for dismissing the approaches of their predecessors as relics of a prescientific age. As David Truman (1971, xviii) wrote, quite unfairly,

Until after World War II most political scientists were preoccupied with the formalities of government. Aside from those concerned with the speculative, philosophical side of the discipline, most of them focused their energies on descriptions of and commentaries on constitutions and formal institutions, with excursions, not necessarily minor, into prescriptions for change and for reform.

Others acknowledged the scientific aspirations of the preceding generation, but dismissed their work as the mere collection of facts.<sup>21</sup> Postwar political scientists thought of themselves as making a properly scientific departure. They were therefore not inclined to cultivate, or even take cognizance of, the theoretical frameworks of the past.<sup>22</sup> Among other things, the prewar interest of American political scientists in the possibilities of autonomous state action disappeared from the collective memory of the discipline. At the same time that the dark shadow of totalitarianism kept political scientists from pinning any normative hopes on state autonomy, it also directed their attention away from the autonomy that the American state already enjoyed as a matter of empirical fact.

The new orientations of political science—(philosophical) value relativism, (empirical) value pluralism, procedural consensus, nonideological interest groups, democratic process, dispersed power, and the United States as the democratic ideal—together formed what David Ricci has called a “new liberal matrix” for postwar political science. Already by the early 1940s these emphases had crystallized into an analytic framework for the empirical study of democracy, notably in the trail-blazing work of Carl Friedrich and Pendleton Herring, two of the most highly regarded political scientists of the period. Friedrich sketched broad constitutional comparisons between democracies and dictatorships, while Herring, his colleague at Harvard, filled in the details of American proceduralist democracy. For over two decades, this matrix set the parameters of the leading schools of postwar political, legal, and social theory. In particular, they defined the leading paradigms of postwar political science: pluralism, structural function-

alism, and an amalgam of these, modernization theory (or political development theory).

### *How Societal Groups Control the State*

“Pluralism,” as an empirical theory of governance, comes in a variety of flavors. But as this designation has come to be applied, what they all have in common is the claim that political power, or influence, is dispersed among a multiplicity of actors, each “representing” (formally or informally) a different societal group or “interest group.”<sup>23</sup> If populist democracy means majority rule, and oligopoly and dictatorship mean minority rule, then pluralism (or “polyarchy,” in the idiolect of one leading pluralist, Robert Dahl) means “minorities rule” (Dahl 1956, 132). The overwhelming tendency of pluralists has been to see this arrangement as good—a system that is adaptive, because open to emerging social demands, yet stable, because group membership is multiple and overlapping; a system in which inequalities are quite real, yet largely benign, since most every group finds some form of representation in the halls of power, and since the influence of various interest groups varies from time to time and from issue to issue.

The most elaborate account of interest-group politics came early on from David Truman. In his own words, *The Governmental Process* (1951) “is an effort to take the concept of group, especially the interest or ‘pressure’ group, as a primary unit of analysis, and to examine patterns of action on the governmental scene in such terms” (1971, xix). Writing from the perspective of 1970, Truman complained that *The Governmental Process* was “often misunderstood” to imply that “organized nongovernmental groups . . . have a monopoly of initiative in the system,” and that governmental actors are “mere passive recorders or referees of contests among such groups” (ibid., xxxi). If this was a misunderstanding, it was one for which Truman bears the responsibility, since all his examples cut against the notion of state autonomy. His treatment of the executive branch, for example, suggests that the twentieth-century expansion of the executive’s activity in legislation and discretionary administration came in response to interest-group claims upon the government, and that it only brought an increase in the play of these interests within the government. Furthermore, the exceptional cases of governmental initiative that Truman does mention are described as proactive responses to emerging interests not yet

organized as groups (ibid., xix, xxxi, and 397–98).<sup>25</sup> Absent is the notion that government might pursue ends of its own, distinct from those of private citizens; or the possibility that executives might carry into office, and seek to implement, political visions, or “ideologies,” that transcend the normal push and pull of interest-group politics—visions like those of Theodore Roosevelt or Woodrow Wilson, for example. But it is this absence that made *The Governmental Process* so appealing to postwar social scientists. Truman’s picture of American democracy as devoid of state autonomy fell firmly within the postwar relativist framework.

And so did Truman’s book in every other respect. For example, the organized interest groups that march across the pages of *The Governmental Process* are invariably of the mundane sort—labor unions, trade associations, farm lobbies, professional organizations, corporate lobbies—basically the major occupational groups (although with a few “community activity” groups such as the Anti-Saloon League thrown in). The basic image is not of ideological conflict, but of the mundane pursuit of economic favoritism, of the sort that would be recognized today as “rent seeking” (although Truman preferred to think of these activities as appeals for government to help “restore the balance” of a social group after its patterns of interaction have been so disturbed as to place the group in a “serious disequilibrium” from which it cannot recover on its own [1971, 29–31]).

Further, in keeping with the relativist framework, Truman (1971, 50–51) justifies his focus on interest groups, to the exclusion of holistic entities such as “the state,” by denying that Americans share fundamental values. There is no “interest of the nation as a whole” separate from “those of the various groups included within it.”

Even in war, when a totally inclusive interest should be apparent if it is ever going to be, we always find pacifists, conscientious objectors, spies, and subversives, who reflect interests opposed to those of “the nation as a whole.” . . . In developing a group interpretation of politics, therefore, we do not need to account for a totally inclusive interest, because one does not exist.

Of course, absence of shared fundamental values is hardly proven by pointing to the presence of conflicting interests.<sup>26</sup> And the existence or nonexistence of shared values is not even relevant to the question of the existence and autonomy of the state. The very flimsiness of the argu-

ment only evidences the extent to which the existence of value pluralism, and the diminution of the state, could be taken for granted.

Truman professed value neutrality in his empirical research, but this did not mean that Truman's work was noncommittal. American democracy worked, and naturalistic descriptions of its operation blended into prescriptions for its preservation. "The great political task now as in the past is to perpetuate a viable system," Truman (1971, 524) declared in the concluding chapter. Whether this was universally the task that political actors of the past assigned themselves is doubtful, but it certainly was a task that Truman and his cohort embraced. Truman's contribution, as he saw it, was to reverse the judgment of previous generations who had seen organized interest groups as a threat to American democracy.<sup>27</sup> Truman (1971, 322-32) allowed that the structure of American government—its open texture, its division into branches, and the dispersal of the responsibility of each branch across federal, state, and local levels—provides interest groups with numerous and diverse points of access. But on the whole, this is a strength, not a weakness. "This diversity assures a variety of modes for the participation of interest groups in the formation of policy, a variety that is a flexible, stabilizing element" (*ibid.*, 519). Meanwhile, an even more important source of stability comes from the structure of American group affiliations itself. The typical American is a member of a variety of groups. His "overlapping membership" means that each group of which he is a member, in order to maintain his allegiance, must guard against offending the sensibilities of the other groups to which he belongs. And since the range of other groups to which the various members of any one group belong is vast, the demands of this group (and of all groups) upon government will tend to be both moderate and narrow, rather than extreme and comprehensive (*i.e.*, ideological). In sum, the open structure of government, combined with the overlapping structure of group affiliations, give the American political system a "dynamic stability that permits gradual adaptation" (*ibid.*, 535).

Truman's emphasis upon the stability of American interest-group politics would in fact have provided little consolation to previous political scientists, who were concerned about its consequences for the *content* of American governmental policy (especially as they saw this policy being biased in the direction of "big business"). But after the war (and despite the unprecedented degree of industry concentration and industry access to government that the war brought), interest-



group politics was seen as a virtue because of the stability it lent to American democracy.

But the most important source of stability, according to Truman, and the feature of his account that most clearly marks it as a postwar product, is what he calls the American consensus on “the rules of the game.” What is most revealing is the language Truman uses. In a rather opaque passage, Truman (1971, 51) grants that a political system is more than “the ‘sum’ of the organized interest groups in the society. We must go farther to explain the operation of such ideals or traditions as constitutionalism, civil liberties, representative responsibility, and the like.” Without a broad consensus on rules of the game such as these, the system would tear itself apart. But in describing what sustains these rules, Truman (*ibid.*) expressly rejects the notion that it is liberal-democratic ideology: constitutionalism, civil liberties, and so forth, “are not . . . a sort of disembodied metaphysical influence. . . . We know of the existence of such factors only from the behavior and the habitual interactions of men. If they exist in this fashion, they are interests. We can account for their operation and for the system by recognizing such interests as representing . . . potential interest groups in the ‘becoming’ stage of activity.” What Truman seems to be saying is that these rules are not really rules but generalizations from patterns of behavior, that these patterns of behavior reflect interests, and that these interests influence government conduct because they are the interests of “potential groups” that would form were the interests trampled upon. The overwhelming impression left by a passage such as this is that Truman is forcing ideological factors (the “disembodied metaphysical influence” of notions of natural equality, the natural and God-given rights of man, and so forth, traditionally invoked to defend liberal-constitutional practices) into the mold of mundane interests.

Elsewhere in the book, Truman (1971, 129 and 159) provides a less obscure account of what stands behind the American consensus on “the rules of the game.” He does not use the term “democratic culture,” but he invokes its equivalents: democratic “attitudes” and “habit backgrounds.” These, and not a common ideology, are what solve the mystery of social order in a pluralist society.<sup>28</sup> They represent a consensus on procedures rather than a consensus on ends or ideas—just the type of consensus demanded by postwar liberal relativism.

*How Voters Control the State*

What David Truman did for legislative politics, Robert Dahl did for electoral politics. Both in terms of intellectual acuity and influence, Dahl was probably the foremost theorist of democracy of his generation. For Dahl, the core meaning of democracy is popular control over leaders and their decisions. More precisely, democracy, as an ideal type, is a political system in which “the goals of every adult citizen . . . are to be accorded equal value in determining government policies” (Dahl 1956, 32).

Dahl did not believe that this ideal could be closely approximated in the real world. One of the central obstacles lay in the very nature of elections. “Strictly speaking, all an election reveals is the first preferences of some citizens among the candidates standing for office” (1956, 125). What elections do not reveal are citizens’ preferences for policies. One minority segment of the electorate may vote for candidate A because it prefers his position on issue X, which is of most importance to it, even though it prefers the position of candidate B on issues Y and Z. Another minority segment votes for A because it prefers his position on issue Y, even though it prefers the position of candidate B on issues X and Z. And a third minority segment votes for A because it prefers his position on issue Z, even though it prefers the position of candidate B on issues X and Y. Because of this variation in the way that voters rank issues—an artifact of variations in preference *intensity*—candidate A ends up with a winning aggregation of minorities, even though broad majorities would prefer the policies of candidate B. “This,” Dahl concludes, “is an instance, not of majority rule or even of minority rule, but of *minorities* rules” (*ibid.*, 128).

Because, as in this example, policy positions are bundled with candidates, and furthermore because some voters reward or penalize a candidate for past (and perhaps irreversible) policies rather than current policy proposals, and because some voters don’t consider policy much at all when voting, elections tell us very little about majority policy preferences. By implication, they can’t be counted on to make politicians responsive to majority preferences. Nor is the problem corrected in the interelection period, for, with most of the citizenry politically disengaged, “most inter-election policy seems to be determined by the efforts of relatively small but relatively active minori-

ties” (Dahl 1956, 130). Making reference to the work of Truman and Arthur Bentley, Dahl (*ibid.*, 131) concludes that

neither elections nor interelection activity provide much insurance that decisions will accord with the preferences of a majority of adults or voters. Hence we cannot correctly describe the actual operations of democratic societies in terms of the contrasts between majorities and minorities. We can only distinguish groups of various types and sizes, all seeking in various ways to advance their goals, usually at the expense, at least in part, of others.

Nevertheless, it turns out that a system of “minorities rule,” while not exactly reflecting citizen preferences, is the only real safeguard against tyranny, whether of a majority or a minority. Through careful logical analysis, Dahl shows that formal constitutional checks and balances cannot be counted on to prevent majority tyranny. But if specific policies are, in the usual case, the product of “minorities rule,” then the worries of Madison, Tocqueville, and others about the tyranny of the majority is misplaced. “If majority rule is mostly a myth, then majority tyranny is mostly a myth too. For if the majority cannot rule, surely it cannot be tyrannical” (*ibid.*, 133).<sup>29</sup> At the same time, “minorities rule” protects minorities. Because policy making is dominated by “relatively small but politically active minorities,” and because a group whose freedoms are under threat is liable to become politically active, it will usually be able to check the grosser dimensions of the threat.<sup>30</sup> Not formal constitutional rights, nor formal constitutional checks, but “social checks” are what protect minorities (*ibid.*, 35, 135, 143).

But the freedom that democratic leaders have from true majority control does not translate into state autonomy, for they remain highly responsive to the politically active minorities that form their winning coalition. Elections, combined with continuous political competition among individuals and parties,

make governmental leaders so responsive to non-leaders that the distinction between democracy and dictatorship still makes sense. . . . Elections and political competition do not make for government by majorities in any very significant way, but they vastly increase the size, number, and variety of minorities whose preferences must be taken into account by leaders in making policy choices. I am inclined to think that it is in this characteristic of elections—not minority rule but

minorities rule—that we must look for some of the essential differences between dictatorships and democracies. (Dahl 1956, 132.)

As can be inferred from this passage, state autonomy is a trait of totalitarian dictatorships.<sup>31</sup> Protection of the interests of each minority, and responsiveness of government officials to the aggregate of minorities, are traits of democracies.

And they are especially the traits of American democracy.

A central guiding thread of American constitutional development has been the evolution of a political system in which all the active and legitimate groups in the population can make themselves heard at some crucial stage in the process of decision. (Dahl 1956, 137.)

As already noted, this is not the result of the written Constitution.

To assume that this country has remained democratic because of its Constitution seems to me an obvious reversal of the relation; it is much more plausible to suppose that the Constitution has remained because our society is essentially democratic. (Ibid., 143.)

Consistent with the consensus theory approach, Dahl downplays the import of official discourses of legitimacy—the stuff of “ideology”—and highlights social conditions and culture in sustaining democracy. In particular, Dahl enumerates eight procedural rules, or norms, as preconditions of a responsive government—the eight defining characteristics of “polyarchy.” And while Dahl emphasizes that no society ever has, or probably ever could, enforce all these rules to a maximal degree, he closes *A Preface to Democratic Theory* with a brief history of the American Republic, in which he submits that, through contingencies of geography, demographics, and history, the United States, to a unique degree, has come to possess the characteristics of a polyarchy.

With all its defects, [the American political system] does nonetheless provide a high probability that any active and legitimate group will make itself heard effectively at some stage in the process of decision. . . .

Probably this strange hybrid, the normal American political system, is not for export to others. But so long as the social prerequisites of democracy are substantially intact in this country, it appears to be a relatively efficient system for reinforcing agreement, encouraging moder-

ation, and maintaining social peace in a restless and immoderate people operating a gigantic, powerful, diversified, and incredibly complex society. (*Ibid.*, 150, 151.)

### *How Democratic States Meet Societal Needs*

The other major theoretical development that came to be assimilated to the relativist framework is structural functionalism. Its original home was in sociology, where it was primarily developed by Talcott Parsons. Parsons's work did not find an immediate audience. It surely did not help his cause that he was virtually an illiterate in American sociology and uninterested in engaging with it, dismissing it in 1932 as "either glorified economics [or] glorified behaviorism" (quoted in Camic 1991, xxxix). Parsons's own intellectual outlook and research agenda were initially set by American institutionalist economics (especially by Walton Hamilton and Clarence Ayers, with whom he studied at Amherst). Graduate study in the 1920s at London and Heidelberg largely confirmed his institutionalist predilections, but changed his reference group to the great European theorists (especially Hobhouse, Weber, Durkheim, and Pareto), which only further hindered communication with American readers. But his "action theory" found a newly receptive audience after the rise of the relativist defense of democracy.

Two things paved the way for its reception. On the one hand, it conformed to the mold of a "consensus theory." At the core of Parsons's theory was a solution to "the problem of order" raised by the means-ends ("instrumental") conception of action that he adopted from his neoclassical economist colleagues at Harvard. What allows instrumentally rational actors to avoid conflict with each other? His solution was to conceive of instrumental action as embedded within a regulative cultural framework. This was obviously reminiscent of the "consensus theory" image of a pluralist society held together by a cultural consensus on procedures, even though Parsons placed greater emphasis on "common ultimate values" as a key component of this consensus.

Parsons's work was filled with concepts reassuring to a generation of social scientists anxious to show how a pluralist world was knit together. Especially appealing for political scientists was Parsons's notion of society as a self-maintaining system of social roles, through which sundry social "functions" are carried out. Each component of this characterization struck a familiar note.

First, the notion of a “system,” like that of a “process,” suggested that the meat of politics lay beyond formal constitutional structure and its accompanying ideological discourse. But the notion had additional advantages, in its stronger suggestion of totality and stability. “The term *system*,” Gabriel Almond (1956, 393) enthused, “satisfies the need for an inclusive concept which covers all of the patterned actions relevant to the making of political decisions. . . . In contrast to *process*, the concept of *system* implies a totality of relevant units, an interdependence between the interactions of units, and a certain stability in the interaction of these units.” Second, the notion of the “role” as the basic “relevant unit” of the political system focused attention on procedures rather than substance, on means rather than ends. To focus on roles is to focus on recurrent behavior—that which is formally or informally proceduralized. If one takes the next step, as did Almond (1956, 394–95), and defines the political system as a “patterned interact of roles” or “structure of roles,” then scientific analysis of politics is given over to the description of normal procedure, and the question of ends, especially ends that challenge the existing system, falls by the wayside.

Third, to focus on the social whole as a *self-maintaining* system of roles implies an overlapping consensus on these procedures; in Parsonian language, “shared role expectations” keep the system tending toward “equilibrium.” Procedural consensus thus stood as a leading prophylactic against social disintegration, as it did in consensus theory in general. Fourth, breaking down political systems into discrete “functions” was an ideal already familiar to those experimenting with “process” theories, and furthermore, it seemed to hold the key to a value-neutral description of political systems. As Almond (1965, 186) put it, “The concept of function pushes us into realism and away from normative or ideological definitions. To answer functional questions we have to observe what a particular social system actually is and does.” It also promised a neutral method of comparing political systems by breaking them down into common functions and comparing their means for fulfilling these functions.

Finally, the tendency of structural functionalism to reduce social theory to an exercise in empirical classification was, from the point of view of the postwar generation of social scientists, actually a strength and not a weakness, for it divorced social theory from the controversial normative agendas of theorists such as Marx, Comte, and Spencer. This reduction was a telling development. On the surface, it would seem to be no more than the continuation of prewar natural-

ism. But looking more deeply, the focus of structural functionalism on the objective description of social systems rather than on the objective description of social problems (a leading preoccupation of pre-war naturalistic social scientists) betrayed an implicit satisfaction with the existing order. Even though Parsons himself was a strong supporter of reform efforts, particularly as directed at America's African-American population, his formal theoretical work reflected both his Weberian sympathies and the broader scientific mood in dropping such evaluative questions. In sum, structural functionalism's emphasis on extra-constitutional processes, on procedures rather than substance, on stability through procedural consensus, on official value agnosticism while implicitly accepting the "is" as an "ought"—all of this fit neatly within the relativist framework.

But what for our purposes is most relevant is the part structural functionalism played in obscuring the realities of state autonomy. Its supposition that roles interacted stably, while not strictly inconsistent with the notion of state autonomy, certainly downplayed it, as did the hypothesis that systems tend toward equilibrium. But the "systems" concept downplayed state autonomy in a more direct way, by leaning on an "energy conversion" metaphor to describe the relation of government to society. As Almond (1965, 189) put it, "Another way of thinking about the interaction of political systems with their environments is to divide the process into three phases, as is usually done in systems theory—input, conversion, output." "Inputs" are the demands made upon the government. "Outputs" are the policies, rules, and regulations that government enacts. "Conversion" is the process internal to the political system that turns inputs into outputs. This language didn't exactly rule out the possibility of state autonomy. Almond (e.g., *ibid.*, 194) himself made a practice of noting that inputs may be generated from within the political system by political elites. Nevertheless, the energy metaphor of input-conversion-output relegated state autonomy to the background. And as we will see, even in Almond's account, such autonomy was minimized in well-functioning democracies.

### *Theorizing State Autonomy Away*

Almond was arguably the most eminent specialist of his generation in comparative political development, a field with close ties to "modern-

ization theory." Not coincidentally, he was also the most able synthesizer of all of these strands of relativist democratic theory.

For one thing, Almond accepted the democracy/totalitarianism dichotomy as the organizing principle for comparative work. Although he criticized the dichotomous schema of early comparativists such as Carl Friedrich for being exclusively focused on Western political systems, his own typology retains the dichotomy and simply tacks on two new categories that amount to mixed modes. As introduced in 1956, Almond's typology distinguishes "the Anglo-American . . . , the Continental European . . . , the pre-industrial, or partially industrial, political systems outside the European-American area, and the totalitarian political systems." The first and last of these reproduce the standard democracy/totalitarian dichotomy, while the middle two lie somewhere in between (Almond 1956, 392-93 and 408).

Moreover, Almond was a pioneer among political scientists in translating the categories of liberal constitutionalism into those of structural-functionalism, the better to compare Western and non-Western regimes.

Instead of the concept of the "state," limited as it is by legal and institutional meanings, we prefer "political system"; instead of "powers," which again is a legal concept in connotation, we are beginning to prefer "functions"; instead of "offices" (legal again), we prefer "roles"; instead of "institutions," which again directs us toward formal norms, "structures"; instead of "public opinion" and "citizenship training," formal and rational in meaning, we prefer "political culture" and "political socialization." (Almond 1960, 4.)

And finally, Almond adopted the pluralists' account of the American political system, which he used not only to differentiate democracy from totalitarianism, but also to distinguish a "modern" from a "traditional" political system. Indeed, it is in comparative work that the postwar status of American democracy as a norm becomes clearest. What passes as an objective description of existing institutions domestically becomes the ideal terminus of a process of political modernization overseas.

The keystone of Almond's ambitious analytical framework is the pluralist ideal of a political system that is maximally open and responsive to the (non-ideological) interests of the populace—one that smoothly translates multifarious narrow demands into uniform, moderate public policy. Whether speaking of the difference between tradi-



tional and modern political systems, or between totalitarian and democratic ones, the central contrasts Almond draws center on how fluidly societal interests influence state policy.

Almond highlights a number of variables as particularly important to securing this fluidity: the kind of interests advanced (what he calls the “style of interest articulation”); the kind of “structures,” or vehicles, that carry these interests into the political process; the style and structure of political parties; the maintenance of firm boundaries between functionally differentiated structures; and, conditioning them all, the character of the reigning “political culture.” As we will see, each of these variables has a pluralist, relativist pedigree, though now translated into the idiom of structural functionalism. And all are placed on a continuum running simultaneously from totalitarian to democratic and from traditional to modern.

As Almond sees it, the key to maintaining fluidity in the political system lies less on the “output” side (rule making, rule application, and rule adjudication) than on the “input” side (the process of “interest articulation” and “interest aggregation”). Interest aggregation is particularly crucial, since only when interests aggregate can they be translated into a single public policy. But not just any kind of interest is aggregable.

With regard to the style of interest articulation, the more latent, diffuse, particularistic, and affective the pattern of interest articulation, the more difficult it is to aggregate interests and translate them into public policy. Hence a political system characterized by these patterns of interest articulation will have poor circulation between the rest of the society and the political system, unless the society is quite small and has good cue-reading authorities. On the other hand, the more manifest, specific, general, and instrumental the style of interest articulation, the easier it is to maintain the boundary between the polity and society, and the better the circulation of needs, claims, and demands from the society in aggregable form into the political system. A political system with an interest articulation structure and style of this kind can be large and complex and still efficiently process raw demand inputs from the society into outputs responsive to the claims and demands of that society. (Almond 1960, 36.)

Decoded (and as Almond’s accompanying examples make yet more clear), this contrast, drawn in terms of systems-theory “pattern variables,” amounts to a contrast, familiar from pluralist theory, between

“mundane” occupational-group type interests (which in this view are readily aggregable) and “ideological” interests (which are not). The former are characteristic of the Anglo-American, democratic systems; the latter are characteristic of those elements of the Continental European and preindustrial political systems that are totalitarian in flavor (34-38).

The character of the “structures” through which interests are articulated also affects the ease and extent of aggregation. Almond distinguishes four main types of structures that may be used to articulate interests: (1) associational interest groups (the “classic” organized interest groups—trade unions, business associations, civic groups, and suchlike); (2) non-associational interest groups (“kinship and lineage groups, ethnic, regional, religious, status and class groups which articulate interests informally, and intermittently,” through informal delegations, for example, or through a member’s friendly request to the state legislator at the country club); (3) anomic interest groups (street protests, riots); and (4) institutional interest groups (legislatures, political executives, armies, bureaucracies, judicial circuits and the like; or legislative blocs, officer cliques and bureaucratic coteries within these organizations, which “articulate their own interests or represent the interest of groups in the society” beyond their formal function of rule making, rule execution, or rule adjudication (Almond 1960, 33-34). As this last category shows, Almond was well aware of the phenomenon of state autonomy, especially in totalitarian and “developing” countries. But he thought of it as a pathology, at least in large-scale societies, and downplayed its presence in the Atlantic democracies. Britain and America are blessed with a preponderance of associational interest groups, which organize interests in a manner that aids their smooth “processing”; while France, like other Continental European countries, and like many developing nations, is plagued by the other three varieties, which inject “raw,” “diffuse,” “unprocessed” claims directly into the conversion system, in a manner that makes it difficult to aggregate them with other interests (*ibid.*, 35). In short, the interest-group pluralism of Truman and Dahl turns out to be the most fluid way to translate societal demands into public policy. And once again, its polar opposite is totalitarianism, where political initiative and social mobilization originate from the political apex.

Almond acknowledges “multi-functionality” among structures even in the most differentiated political systems, such as the American one. For example, interest groups are frequently involved not only in interest articulation, but also in interest aggregation (as when the

“peak” labor and trade associations aggregate the interests of local units) and in rule making (helping write bills). Nevertheless, Almond (1960, 35–38) argues that relatively firm boundaries are conducive to the free circulation of interests into and through the political system, and therefore are to be preferred. That these structures are “bounded,” it is worth noting, does not mean that they are autonomous in Skocpol’s sense. On the contrary. When Almond speaks of the “autonomy” of these structures, he means that they are functionally differentiated, and therefore maximally open and responsive to the surrounding societal structures. And in the division of labor that Almond commends, political initiative lies with “society,” while responsiveness in rule-making lies with the political system, or the state. In other words, Almond’s emphasis on “good boundary maintenance” amounts to a strong criticism of state autonomy. Again, the defining contrast is between democratic and totalitarian political systems, with the “traditionalist” and “transitional” systems largely assimilated to the totalitarian:

In certain political systems, such as the authoritarian and the primitive ones, the three functions of articulation, aggregation, and rule-making may be hardly differentiated from one another. . . . In other systems, such as the modern Western ones, there are partitions in the process, and separate structures or subsystems with boundaries take a distinctive part. Certainly, in the Anglo-American mass democracies this three fold division in function maintains the flow from society to polity and from polity to society (from input to output to input again) in an especially efficient manner. (Ibid., 39.)

In keeping with pluralist themes, Almond notes the diffusion of power within fluid democratic systems. “The role structure” in the Anglo-American political systems “is (1) highly differentiated, (2) manifest, organized, and bureaucratized, (3) characterized by a high degree of stability in the functions of the roles, and (4) likely to have a diffusion of power and influence within the political system as a whole” (Almond 1956, 399). Totalitarianism again provides the extreme contrast. It is a significantly “non-consensual” system, where the dissolution of voluntary associations leaves the citizenry “atomized,” and where, within the state, multiple overlapping command channels are continually used by the supreme leader to destabilize functional roles (ibid., 404). This has the effect of preventing any stable delegation of power or creation of rival power centers, and insures

to the greatest possible extent that all commands will be carried out. Totalitarianism, in other words, is a system of maximum power concentration and maximum state autonomy, while the Anglo-American system is one of minimum power concentration and minimum state autonomy.<sup>32</sup>

Almond's work may be taken as the culmination of a remarkable transformation, in which American democracy, so recently maligned by American intellectuals for its lack of critical intelligence and its domination by special interests, came to be embraced by them as a domestic blessing and an international model. Admiration for the political system of the United States was directed neither at its substantive values nor at the ends it pursued, about which there was almost complete silence. Admiration was directed instead at its procedures. This resolves the seeming paradox of a political science that, while professing to abjure value judgments, was clearly in sympathy with the political system of the United States. One could admire a process without making a value judgment—at least, so it seemed—because process was about the “how,” not the “what,” of politics.

But the “how” of American politics that postwar political scientists conjured up—their model of American democracy—was skewed. It carried forward emphases and assumptions that were highly polemical in origin, born of the encounter with totalitarianism. First, the emergence of Hitler and Stalin as the ultimate social engineers led American political scientists to forget their erstwhile Progressive allegiance to elite guidance, and what is more, to fall silent about all such activities in the American governmental system. If totalitarianism means elite social engineering, then American democracy must mean popular control. Second, their debate with the “ethical absolutists” led them to project their own ethical skepticism (or relativism) onto American democracy as a whole. Since moral absolutists are but totalitarians in waiting, Americans must be moral skeptics. And by implication, American politics must be pluralist (multi-valued, non-ideological, non-moralistic, moderate, bargaining). Put these assumptions together and one gets neither the tyranny of minority (or expert) rule, nor the tyranny of the majority, but what we might call the “pluralist populism” of “minorities rule.”

Translated into institutional terms, this meant a politics dominated by interest groups, both in the legislative process and in the electoral process. While no doubt some groups would manage, some of the time, to impose some values on other groups, the system was mini-

mally coercive because the process was open to all comers, and the “winning” groups changed regularly. Power was dispersed and shifting. Translated yet again into systems theory, this meant a “fluid” political system in which political initiative originates from outside government, is carried into it by interest groups, and is converted, through bargaining, into public policy. Input, conversion, output. Government becomes purely responsive—to societal energy. The image is of society acting upon itself.

### *From Pluralism to Weberianism*

Pluralist theories are striking in their sophistication, their welcome aspiration toward holism, the range and interest of the evidence they highlight, their attention to institutions and activities beyond formal governmental structures, and their subtle analysis of numerous features of governance. Nevertheless, pluralist democratic theory has come in for a good deal of normative and empirical criticism over the years, much of it justified.<sup>33</sup> For example, pluralist analyses of the dispersion of power have been criticized as methodologically flawed owing to their superficial, “one-dimensional” power concept. To understand the distribution of power, one must not only know who makes the final policy decisions, but also why some decisions are never made at all because the relevant issues are systematically excluded from the political agenda (the “second dimension” of power), and why some potential issues are not even perceived as such because of the forces of political education, propaganda, and other influences on political perception (the “third dimension”) (see Bachrach and Baratz 1962 and Lukes 1974).

Skocpol’s criticism of pluralist and structural-functionalist frameworks, as already noted, is that they neglect the capacity of states—even Western, liberal democratic, “pluralist” states—“to formulate and pursue goals that are not simply reflective of the demands or interests of social groups, classes, or society” (1985, 9). In this connection, she suggests a return to a continental European perspective, particularly that of Weber, whose work on bureaucracy and administration emphasizes the state’s capacity for independent agency; and she cites several interesting contemporary studies, including one of her own, that emphasize the decisive role played by autonomously acting bureau-

crats and civil service administrators in everything from mundane policy formation to “revolution from above” (*ibid.*, 9–14).

None of the examples cited by Skocpol take up the question of the autonomy of the elected political leader—although, judging from a passing criticism she makes (Skocpol 1985, 4) of the treatment Mayor Richard Lee receives in Dahl’s study of New Haven politics, I believe she would argue that pluralists downplayed this as well. By way of conclusion, therefore, I would like to fill in this portion of the critique of pluralism. We can take up Skocpol’s invitation and go to Weber for this point, too—by turning not to Weber’s writings on bureaucracy and administration, but to his complementary writings on electoral politics.

The pluralist image of electoral politics is of coalition building among interest groups in the narrow sense. Its signal virtue is that it secures a form of popular control of public policy. There is absolutely no doubt that assembling working coalitions of organized interest groups is an important dimension of democratic politics—important both for directly securing the votes of their members and for securing funds to pay for the enormous cost of a modern political campaign. But coalition politics is not everything, and arguably such a view of politics misses the most important thing.

The general political problem, as understood by Weber, is *not* to secure popular control of public policy. Weber had little confidence in the political knowledge or judgment of what he referred to as “the mass,” and he would have been an inveterate opponent of democracy for Germany had he believed that extending the franchise would hand over control to this element. Rather, in Weber’s view, the measure of a political system is its ability to recruit political leaders who, in the face of public ignorance and indifference (and even at times in the face of uninformed, or short-sighted, or low-minded popular opposition), will take responsibility for the future of the nation and (if governing a world power) for the direction of world history. In other words, Weber’s vision of politics focused on securing political leaders with the inner and outer capacity to act autonomously on behalf of the national interest and even the interest of humankind, as best they may determine it. He favored extending the franchise because he believed that, under modern conditions, political democracy is better able to secure such leaders than any known alternative. In this respect, it is hard to imagine an account of democracy more at odds with that of the pluralists.

I have presented Weber's case for political democracy at length elsewhere (Ciepley 1999, 205–225). For present purposes, two points are of particular importance: Weber's attitude toward a politics dominated by organized interest groups, and his understanding of the vocation of the political leader.

With respect to interest-group politics, Weber advocated democracy not because it would allow organized interests to more easily penetrate the political system, but because it would give the political leader a degree of *freedom* from these interests—especially economic interests. No system of governance can avoid the influence of money. But only systems of governance in which the ultimate currency of power (such as the ballot) is nonpecuniary and broadly distributed have any chance of escaping total dominance by the interests of financiers and bond traders (Weber 1994, 104–105, 215). But the point of the franchise isn't for government to be subjected to voter control. It is to give political leaders an independent basis of support, located in the public at large, from which they may act responsibly on behalf of the public interest as they see it (and which is not reducible to the vector sum of private interests).

In many respects, it will be noted, Weber's view is vintage Progressivism, of the expert-oriented variety. Interest groups threaten to hijack the public interest, and autonomous executives are called on to rescue it.<sup>34</sup> But Weber (1994, 126) differed from the main line of expert-Progressivism in that he avoided reducing politics to technicism, to a collection of social problems best tackled by technical experts. Expert civil servants play a crucial role in Weber's account of modern democracy. Political leaders provide them with a few general directives, in a few policy areas of most concern to the leaders (depending on their personal political "cause" and their political promises), but for the most part, these civil servants are the ones who set the main lines of policy and work out the details. Like the expert-Progressives, Weber envisions the exercise of considerable autonomy in bureaucracy. Nevertheless, executive autonomy is not exhausted by their work. There is also the autonomy of the political leader himself. This brings us to the second point.

From a Weberian perspective, it is a complete misunderstanding of the character of democracy to view democratic political leaders as passive instruments of society and its interest groups. First of all, such a view ignores the psychology of the political leader. Politics is a voluntary vocation, and the kind of political campaigning and party

struggle that is necessary to victory in a mass democracy simply doesn't attract such self-abnegating characters.

The business of politics is carried out by *interested parties*. (By "interested parties" I do *not* mean those vested material interests which influence politics in varying degrees, whatever form the state takes, but rather those people with political interests who strive for political power and responsibility in order to realize particular political ideas.) Yet precisely this conduct of politics by interested parties is the heart of the matter. For it is not the politically passive "mass" which gives birth to the leader; rather the political leader recruits his following and wins over the mass by "demagogy." (Weber 1994, 228.)

Weber's invocation of "demagogy" is liable to frighten. Suffice it to say that Weber did not believe demagogy to be exclusive to democracies; he understood it to be the indispensable tool of leaders in all polities no longer anchored by a passive peasantry (Weber 1994, 220). And he noted that democracies at least have available to them a number of devices (such as parties and parliaments) that help weed out "mere" demagogues from the political fold (*ibid.*, 343-44). But the important point being made in this passage is that the political leader is an interested party. He is a person with a "passionate commitment to a 'cause'" (*ibid.*, 353), or at least to some political idea or persuasion, and he engages in the struggle for political power in order to give it effect. In this respect, his vocation is the exact opposite of that of the bureaucratic official:

Like "leaders," "officials" too are expected to make independent decisions and show organizational ability and initiative, not only in countless individual cases but also on larger issues. An official who receives an order which, in his view, is wrong can—and should—raise objections. If his superior then insists on the instruction it is not merely the duty of the official, it is also a point of *honour* for him to carry out that instruction as if it corresponded to his own innermost conviction, thereby demonstrating that his sense of duty to his office overrides his individual willfulness. . . . This is what is demanded by the spirit of *office*. (*Ibid.*, 160.)

In other words, officials enjoy a fair amount of autonomy, but when push comes to shove, it is the duty and honor of the official to say "yes" to his master, the political leader. In sharp contrast,



A political *leader* who behaved like this would deserve our *contempt*. He will often be obliged to make compromises, which means sacrificing something of lesser importance to something of greater importance. If, however, he is incapable of saying to his master, whether this be a monarch or the *demos*, “either you give me this instruction or *I resign*,” he is not a leader but merely what Bismarck called a miserable “clinger” to office. The official should stand “above the parties,” which in truth means that he must remain outside the *struggle* for power of his own. The struggle for personal power and the acceptance of full *personal responsibility for one’s cause* (*Sache*) which is the consequence of such power—this is the very element in which the politician and the entrepreneur live and breathe. (Ibid.)

In short, nothing could be further from the spirit of the political leader than to implement the interests of others. Autonomous action in the service of a personal cause is his calling, his very reason for entering the political fray.

Furthermore, having a cause turns out to be instrumental to the leader’s political success. On the one hand, having a cause provides a “firm inner support” (Weber 1994, 355) for his actions. The decisive means of governance, after all, is violence (ibid., 360), and only such inner support can steel him against a loss of nerve in its use, or steer him away from discrediting self-contradictions (ibid., 354). On the other hand, commitment to a cause provides him his necessary *external* support—for, in order for a political leader to succeed, he must have about him a disciplined following, and “he can only keep control of his following as long as a sincere belief in his person and his cause inspires at least some of the group”—even if not a majority of them (ibid., 365). In short, the political leader’s cause is what sustains him, psychologically and materially. Compared to it, the role of interest groups is quite secondary, and operates largely after the fact. The cause is the linchpin, the focus of his autonomy *vis à vis* society and its self-understood interests.<sup>35</sup>

The view of democratic political leaders as passive instruments of societal interests also overestimates the extent to which the body of the voting public translates its interests into policy preferences, or uses such policy preferences as a standard for judging political candidates, or indeed even *has* policy preferences. In Weber’s view, political leadership approximates to the ideal type of “charismatic rule”—“rule by virtue of devotion to the purely personal ‘charisma’ of the ‘leader’ on the part of those who obey him” (1994, 312). In other words, devo-

tion to the political leader is primarily focused on his personal qualities, not his policy positions. People “believe” in him and in his “call” to the task of leading men.<sup>36</sup> Although we don’t know the exact number of people who voted for John McCain in the Republican and open primaries on account of his policy positions, we can surmise that the number was not large. It was his personal story, not his policy, that brought over voters even from the political left. It is this charismatic dimension of political leadership that grants the leader leeway to pursue his cause, whatever the exact policy preferences of the electorate might be.

However, even if we move beyond Weber and grant that, for at least some voters, message matters, then it still must be said that the pluralist view of democratic leaders as instruments of organized interests exaggerates the extent to which the voting public looks to politicians to serve their particular interests, as opposed to those of the nation. Pluralists took their image of a legislative process dominated by interest groups and imposed it upon the electoral process as well. “In a rough sense,” Dahl (1956, 68) wrote, “the essence of all competitive politics is bribery of the electorate by politicians.” But unfortunately for the pluralist view, it has been noted that “even the most dogged searchers after self-interested voting, could find paltry evidence for it, in comparison to the healthy effect of judgments of national conditions” (Wolfinger 1988, 110). As a result, campaigns focused on interest satisfaction have proven to be clear losers in actual political contest. Every so often a “candy store” politician manages to win office, but he is usually easy prey for an opponent with a reasonable command of “the vision thing.” Joe Klein (1996, 31) expressed this well, in commenting on the lackluster group of candidates fielded by the Republican party for the 1996 presidential election:

There is a hard, cold edge to [Senator Phil] Gramm, as there is to the entire Republican field. They talk tax rates, not virtues. They talk about efficiency, about giving people their money back, about returning government to local communities. That is important, and attractive—but insufficient. America is bound by more than the sum of our self-interested strivings. There is a national sense of romance, of destiny. There is a need for shared “challenges,” a word the president wore out last week. Ronald Reagan tapped into those feelings—effortlessly. At his best, Bill Clinton can do it, too. Phil Gramm can call this sort of rhetoric “empty,” but it’s the battlefield on which presidencies are won.

Even where one would most expect the political leader to have to relinquish his autonomy—in the currying of voter favor—the political leader is rarely pinned down on specific policy. Electoral success is more about mobilizing aspirations than interests. And arguably, it is more about charisma than either of these.

Weber's position on the autonomy of democratic leaders should hardly surprise the student of American politics, unless she imagines, for example, that the election of Reagan after Carter reflected a sudden swing in American public opinion from liberal to conservative. Public opinion definitely sets limits on what a democratic leader may undertake. But this is not nearly as constraining as are the opinions of rival elites. And neither public nor elite opinion comes close to putting the pluralist straightjacket on a chief executive with high political skills—especially the ability to “fight with words,” as Weber would say. Nor is this all bad, if, as Weber argues, there are “autonomous political interests” vital to national preservation that fall beyond the attention horizon of citizens outside of the elite political stratum.<sup>37</sup> Skocpol's call for a return to Weber is welcome, and should encompass not only his writings on bureaucracy and the state, but his writings on politics more generally.

#### NOTES

1. In addition to the Herbst volume, among the best general writings on the influence of the German academic experience upon American universities and American academic conceptions of government, economy, and the role of academics, are those of Edward Shils. See, for example, Shils 1989 and Shils, “German and American Universities in their Reciprocal Relations (unpublished manuscript).
2. That this wasn't usually the actual consequence of such populist reforms is a separate issue from their intent.
3. For a good example of such optimism regarding autonomous administration, see Landis 1938.
4. Compare editions before and after 1908, the year of Young's intervention. Ross 1991, 192–93 also notes the shift.
5. On the origins and early history of the totalitarian concept, see Adler and Paterson 1970; Diggins 1972; and Lifka 1988. The brief alliance between the democracies of Western Europe and the Soviet Union in the defeat of Nazi Germany and fascist Japan brought a temporary waning of totalitarianism as a defining political category. But the onset of the Cold War quickly brought it back in full force (see Gleason 1995).

6. I review this history in “Totalitarianism and the Rediscovery of Civil Liberties,” ch. 4 of Ciepley 2001.
7. For a good general account of the institutionalization of the freedom/totalitarianism dichotomy in American social science, see Lifka 1988, chs. 1–3. See also Purcell 1973, chs. 11 and 13. For its institutionalization in law, see Peller 1988.
8. It is worth adding that, from the end of the nineteenth century into the early decades of the twentieth, it was something of a commonplace among educators defending the place of science in the university curriculum that scientific virtues—“a passion for knowledge, the love of truth, honesty, patience, singlemindedness of mind [sic], simplicity of character, humility, reverence, [and] imagination”—were not only also Christian virtues, but also the virtues required of a democratic citizenry. See Reuben 1996, 136.
9. Terminological precision would demand that we rename this the “skeptical theory of democracy,” since, in its most perspicuous usage, “moral relativism” means that value questions *are* rationally decidable *within* the framework of a given cultural group or “conceptual scheme,” whereas “moral skepticism” implies that they are never rationally decidable. The latter claim lay behind the new theory. Nevertheless, in popular usage “relativism” regularly incorporates the skeptical position, so Purcell’s designation may stand.
10. The central documents for understanding Weber’s case for democracy are collected in Weber 1994. On the present point, representative passages can be found at pp. 15–16, 228, and 355. For a synthetic overview of Weber’s case, see Ciepley 1999. For a brief view, see the concluding section of the present essay.
11. For able documentation of the importance of virtue in classical political liberalism, see Berkowitz 1999. For the place of virtue in classical economic liberalism, see the essays collected in Hont and Ignatieff 1983.
12. For some of the leading contributions to the debate, see the essays collected in Waxman 1969 and Rejai 1971.
13. It is perhaps worth noting that this tension between the academic and “lay” response to totalitarianism is one of the roots of the legal, political, and cultural conflicts that comprise the “culture wars.”
14. Below I only touch on developments in empirical political science in the first two decades after the war.
15. Michael Sandel (1996, 4–5) has noted that state neutrality does not emerge as an American ideal until after World War II, but he still assumes that it was an ideal of European classical liberals.
16. Dewey (1939) himself had helped shift attention to culture, arguing that successful democracies had a “scientific” culture.
17. Louis Hartz’s *The Liberal Tradition in America* ([1955] 1991), one of the most important works of the consensus school of historians, is a brilliant elaboration of Hofstadter’s thesis.
18. See, for example, the transitional position that had been staked out by Pendleton Herring already in 1940, who argued that the function of democ-

- matic politicians “is to stand for relativity in the struggle of absolute values and thus to promote continuity and cohesion in social relations” (Herring 1965, 136; quoted in Ricci 1984, 111).
19. For a contrasting view of the history of the state concept—one that emphasizes the way in which the notion of “interests of state” was used by royal counselors to rein in the arbitrary rule of the monarch, thus turning the notion of the state *against* the notion of sovereignty—see Hirschman 1977.
  20. Herring [1940] 1965 is an early source for all of these reappraisals.
  21. Perhaps it would be more accurate for us to say that prewar social scientists, unhappy with the state of American democracy, wished to use science for the sake of reform and oriented their research toward that end—which might well mean collecting social statistics (“mere facts”) with the intent that they be used by legislatures and government agencies in the task of social reform; while postwar social scientists, generally content with the state of American democracy, were focused on providing a description (even if a rose-tinted description) of the governmental process itself. Nevertheless, each cohort could equally assert the ideals of positivism.
  22. With a few exceptions, as already noted, such as Arthur Bentley’s work on group process.
  23. In fact, neither Truman nor Dahl, two of the leading “pluralists,” identified themselves as such in their early work. Truman, in particular, reserved the term for the guild socialists and syndicalists of the early twentieth century, from whom he wished to distinguish himself. But they more or less acquiesced to the designation once it came to be applied to them.
  24. Robert E. Lane, the Yale political psychologist, put it bluntly: “Our political activists are distributed among social groups in such a way as to open up channels of influence for every group” (quoted in Purcell 1973, 260).
  25. It is unclear that the “misunderstanding” of which Truman complains is anything more than a failure on the part of some readers to take note of these examples of proactive governmental response. But governmental anticipation of external interest pressures hardly qualifies as true state autonomy.
  26. Indeed, even the empirical absence of shared fundamental values does not render incoherent the concept of a “public interest,” unless one already assumes the value skepticism one is trying to establish.
  27. Truman returns to this point repeatedly—in the preface, in the first chapter, in the final chapter—in short, in all the places where the topic of the book is “motivated.”
  28. This “second” account is probably but a more elaborate rendering of the first account. What Truman describes as democratic “attitudes” and “habits” appear to be the basis of what he first described simply as the “interests” of “potential groups.” The reference to potential groups is a roundabout way of saying that people will organize against politicians who consistently violate the rules of the game. The reference to procedural interests is a strained attempt to address questions of legitimacy within the interest-group framework.

29. Unfortunately, Dahl gives us no reason to believe that the rather contrived electoral example he gives will be “the usual case.” But most of his readers were evidently inclined to go along.
30. In a telling piece of relativist arithmetic, Dahl (1956, 90) goes so far as to construe “intense preferences” as the modern equivalent of the “natural rights” that Madison wished to protect from majority tyranny.
31. Although Dahl uses the term “dictatorship” more often than “totalitarianism,” the Soviet Union is the dictatorship he has in mind in this and many other passages.
32. Here as elsewhere, I am sympathetic to the relativists’ portrait of totalitarianism. It is the contrasting portrait of democracy that I find suspect. This is probably to be expected, given that the former serves as the defining Other of the latter.
33. By and large, the criticisms apply *mutatis mutandis* to pluralism’s leading successors, rational choice and public choice, which are interested in the aggregation of individual preferences by political institutions, and which are in this regard merely more sociologically impoverished instantiations of the same set of theoretical assumptions and orientations. However, these successors are beyond the scope of the present paper.
34. For a fine study that situates Weber within the political and intellectual climate of Progressivism, see Kloppenberg 1986.
35. A degree of idealization, it is fair to say, colors Weber’s description of the political leader, whose qualities he wished to contrast favorably to those of the state officials who had been ruling Germany since the resignation of Bismarck. But it is probably also fair to grant that, in an open democratic system, the politician who rises to the top is indeed apt to be a leader in Weber’s sense—one who lives *for* politics rather than merely *from* it.
36. Nor is this unreasonable. Circumstances change, unexpected issues arise (including the highest issue of declaring war), and one wouldn’t want a political leader to be beholden to policy programs calibrated to yesteryear. One looks instead for someone who can be trusted to respond sensibly as situations present themselves. In an uncertain world, character eclipses policy program as the public’s desideratum of qualification for political leadership.
37. Of course this begs the question of the importance of the nation-state, or some comparable political collectivity. The Weberian case for its importance can be found in Ciepley 1999, 217–18.

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