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THE QUIET DESPERATION OF
ROBERT DAHL'S (QUIET) RADICALISM

ABSTRACT: Robert Dahl's democratic theory has been remarkably consistent over the course of his long career. While Dahl has maintained a markedly unromantic view of modern democracy, and can best be read as an imminent critic of its liberal variant, he has steadily clung to certain radical aspirations, even as their prospects have waned. Dahl's often-unnoticed radicalism lies in his desire to see democracy break out of the institutional bonds of the liberal state. Reviewing his career forces one to consider the ultimately utopian character of his quiet radicalism and the significance of its apparent failure. Paradoxically, Dahl's call for the extension of democracy into the economic sphere would be less utopian if it were more radical at its foundation—that is, if his basic premises would lead him to seriously question citizens' existing preferences.

Robert Dahl—the great analyst of democracy in twentieth-century political science—has occasionally dissented from the priorities of his discipline as well as those of the broader liberal-democratic political culture in which it is embedded. In the main, however, his oeuvre is rightly seen as an authoritatively representative voice of both American political science and American political culture. In *Toward Democracy: A Journey* (Berkeley: Institute for Governmental Studies, 1997), the remarkable stability

of his commitments and interests over time is the only aspect of his career displayed more clearly than this fundamentally representative quality. Thus, while the collection's subtitle ("Reflections 1940-1997") surely intends "reflection" to denote serious thought or consideration, it might be taken as well in the word's other sense: as an image cast from, or mirrored back to, its original source.

Here, I will only tangentially discuss Dahl's relationship to the academic discipline he so profoundly influenced in the last half of the century.¹ The matter of Dahl's relationship to the liberal-democratic culture of his native United States during the same period, however, turns out to be at least as interesting and complicated. Contrary to the still-common view that Dahl's thought was radicalized at some time in the 1970s—when he finally acknowledged the political inequality implicit in the pluralist conception of democracy he had pioneered two decades previously—Dahl was deeply concerned with political inequality and was a genuinely radical² thinker from the start. The essays that make up *Toward Democracy*³ reveal an analyst steeped in the values of American political culture, but Dahl derives from those values a uniquely radical perspective that is a consistent presence throughout his career.⁴

In this essay, I inquire more closely into the nature of this often-unrecognized radicalism to show how it coexists with an affirmation of widely shared American political values. In fact, Dahl's work taken as a whole provides clear support for Michael Walzer's claim that "radical detachment [is] . . . not a prerequisite of social criticism, not even of radical social criticism" (1987, 37). Instead of relying on detachment or an appeal to transcendent or transcultural values, Dahl generates his radicalism more quietly, by giving priority to some values implicit in American political culture rather than others. It is Dahl's willingness to push his notion of democracy to its logical limits that provides him with critical distance from the realities of contemporary liberal capitalism.

While Dahl's radicalism displays itself most clearly in his advocacy of workplace democracy, the same values are at work in his support for other institutional extensions of democracy: namely, his argument—presented in various forms over many years—for the creation of multiple levels of democratic authority within the state (i.e., autonomous democratic units below the level of the national state); and his long-expressed concern that international organizations somehow be reconciled with the ideal of democratic control. In each case, Dahl's radicalism expresses his desire to extend the normative principles of democratic decision making beyond the bounds of the state as traditionally conceived by liberal theory—into the economy, as well as to institutions above and below the nation-state level.

Dahl has termed his hoped-for extension of democracy's reach its potential "third transformation." In this schema, a "first transformation" led to the achievement of democracy in the form of the ancient city-state, while a second—two thousand years later—"broke through the limits of all previous structures and beliefs by deliberately applying the idea of democracy to the large domain of the national state" (Dahl 1989, 312).⁵

A striking thing about Dahl's vision of a radicalized liberal democracy is its desperate predicament as the new century dawns. Two years after producing his most up-to-date argument for the third transformation in *A Preface to Economic Democracy*,⁶ Dahl admitted that hopes for such a transformation are, in fact, utopian. "Utopian," he explained, not in the sense that "I would expect these structures to inaugurate a perfect democracy, whatever that might be, nor because they are beyond human reach," but "only because I am not able to point with confidence to the historical forces that are likely to bring them about" (TD, 657). Significantly, Dahl has been silent on the matter of historical forces ever since. In his recent work he has had nothing further to say about how his vision might be realized under current conditions.

It has only been in Dahl's very latest writings, how-

ever, that he has seemed to signal a loss of confidence in the radical vision itself. At the same time, the broader movement for workplace democracy has faded in significance since the early 1980s as the Left's attention has shifted elsewhere. These developments make Dahl's aspirations appear even more hopeless. Despite himself, then, Dahl remains essentially a radical democratic theorist of the liberal nation-state.

The confessed utopianism of Dahl's prescriptions immediately raises an important question. Is Dahl's radicalism really utopian merely because of the (in his view unfortunate, but perhaps correctible) nature of contemporary liberal democracy—or because of a failure of his theoretical imagination? Is there in fact no desirable route toward the "third transformation" of democracy from its contemporary form in the liberal nation-state, or is Dahl simply unable to discern such a route? It seems to me that Dahl's basic justificatory assumptions seriously hinder his ability to theorize a transition to the kind of radical democracy he wants. On the other hand, as the more general waning of the movement for workplace democracy indicates, the problem does not lie solely with Dahl or his theories. Therefore, after describing Dahl's commonly overlooked radicalism and its limits, I will consider more generally the dimmed prospects in today's world for workplace democracy and the other practical elements of Dahl's radicalism, and whether these prospects are to be regretted.

Schumpeterianism, Hayekianism, and Dahl's Critics

My understanding of Dahl as a consistently radical thinker runs counter to his reputation in several ways. Since the appearance of *A Preface to Democratic Theory* (1956)—and particularly since *Who Governs?* (1961)—Dahl has been a favorite target of the Marxian and participatory democratic Left, who see in his work a surreptitious ideological justification of the status quo. In a classic assess-

ment of such criticisms, Quentin Skinner (1973, 288) calls it a "commonplace" that pluralist theories of democracy such as Dahl's have "the status and character of a conservative political ideology."

Dahl's scholarship is suspect in the eyes of many radicals primarily because of a number of theoretical positions he has held over the course of his career. These positions populate essays from each of the six decades of work represented in *Toward Democracy*, and are expressed as well in his many book-length works, including, most recently, *How Democratic is the American Constitution?* (2001).

First of all, Dahl accepts a Schumpeterian view of minimal citizen participation in large democracies. This view expects less civic engagement from the average citizen as the size of the demos increases, and consequently judges the participatory ideal of classical city-state democracy to be unrealistic and inappropriate in the operation of the modern nation-state. This view is stated directly in a 1955 essay:

I think we must conclude that the classic assumptions about the need for total citizen participation in democracy were, at the very least, inadequate It would be more reasonable simply to insist that some minimal participation is required, even though we cannot specify with any precision what this minimum must be. (TD, 818.)

Over the years Dahl repeatedly and adamantly presses this point. Unlike Schumpeter ([1942] 1976, ch. 21), Dahl bases his criticism of the classical participatory ideal almost exclusively on one simple consideration: time. Any large population's attempt to democratically deliberate very quickly runs up against the 24-hour day. As Dahl notes in a 1984 essay,

even if spatial barriers to communication can in principle be eliminated by electronic means, the limits set by time are inexorable. You can easily see how drastic these limits are by a simple arithmetic exercise. You need only to

multiply the number of messages a highly participatory process could reasonably be expected to produce, by the average time you assume a meaningful political message requires. (TD, 109.)

In *On Democracy* (1989, 109), Dahl presents these calculations to demonstrate a "law of time and numbers" according to which "the more citizens a democratic unit contains, the less that citizens can participate directly in government decisions and the more that they must delegate authority to others." In *After the Revolution?* (1970), he uses the same considerations as a basis for his argument against the New Left's call for the creation of genuine participatory democracy in the United States. Democracy in the modern nation-state is not, and cannot be, inclusive, deliberative democracy.

The second factor that produced the impression that Dahl was, at first, a conservative is that, in the context of the Cold War, he pursued a long-term project that heightened the distinction between the Western liberal states and Eastern-bloc authoritarian regimes, and did so in terms of a state's proximity to a normative ideal that was originally derived from an interpretation of the Western bloc's democratic principles.⁷ Dahl himself seems not, however, to have considered his project in ideological terms; he was merely engaged in an effort to distinguish systems that were approximations of democracy (in his term, "polyarchies")⁸ from non-democratic states. Still, many critics experienced such distinction-drawing as self-congratulatory and inherently ideological. Many leftist social theorists of the period—most vocally, the early Frankfurt School thinkers—sought to blur the differences between the West's liberal orders and Eastern-bloc totalitarianism, for argumentative effect. In analyses of this sort, mass consumer society, for example, could be painted as merely totalitarianism of a different variety, where the depersonalizing imperatives of instrumental rationality, supported by a ubiquitous "culture industry" (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 1972), produce a "one-dimensional" mind incapable of

critical reflection, let alone resistance (Marcuse 1964).⁹

But Dahl asserts that the Western liberal states—imperfect as they are—represent a real advance down the road toward the democratic ideal, fundamentally distinguishing them from other regimes, including those of the former East bloc. He insists upon this, in part, by developing over the years a definition of democracy that does not require direct citizen participation in governing, but only that there be institutionally adequate opportunities and protections for forming and expressing individual preferences regarding collective decisions, and that each individual's expressed preferences be taken equally into account. True to its liberal roots, this definition of ideal democracy is realized in a set of procedural rights, not in a substantive state of affairs. In Isaiah Berlin's (1969) terms, democracy, for Dahl, is the achievement of a set of negative, rather than positive, freedoms. Beginning already in the opening chapter of his dissertation, Dahl embarked on this project (TD, 21), and 58 years later, his *On Democracy* begins with a similar presentation of defining criteria. The same intellectual project figures heavily in *Polyarchy* (1971) and plays a significant argumentative role in *A Preface to Democratic Theory* (1956), as well as in *Democracy and Its Critics* (1989) (which largely reproduces the definitive account arrived at in his 1984 essay, "Procedural Democracy").

While his critics did not always notice, Dahl avoided any claim that Western liberal states had actually achieved the status of "democracy" (according to his criteria). But, in a roundabout fashion, he made something akin to such a claim. Alongside his ideal notion of democracy, he posited a set of less demanding institutional criteria, describing something much closer in conception to a Schumpeterian model of rule by competing elites. Dahl linked this "polyarchy" model to the more stringent ideal of democracy by contending that polyarchy represented the best approximation of the democratic ideal, given the serious practical limitations presented by the scale of the

large, modern nation-state. The practices and constitutions of the Western liberal states qualified them as polyarchies—and thus as actual achievements of democracy in its second transformation, the nation-state form.

A third important reason for Dahl's reputation as anything-but-radical stems from his association with the behavioralist movement in political science, and with a positivist orientation toward social phenomena generally. Dahl held to certain positivist tenets, including, at times, a tone of scientific detachment and an observationalist epistemology. This provoked the most heated criticisms of his career, in the so-called "community power" debate that swirled around his study of New Haven in *Who Governs?*¹⁰ Critics of behavioralism worried about serious limitations implicit in the positivist orientation that would, in turn, give any analysis generated from it an ideological bias. For example, in the community power debate, Dahl and other behavioralists insisted that such concepts as "power" be conceptualized in terms capable of empirical operationalization. His critics wondered how, if power were understood solely in terms of observable actions, "non-decisions," or the unobservable limitations of the policy menu, could be properly recognized as (indirect) exercises of political power (Bachrach and Baratz 1962; Lukes 1974). Fueling the rancor of this debate was the larger, still ongoing, controversy within academic political science concerning the adequacy, and the precise meaning, of a scientific approach to the study of politics.

Finally, Dahl has consistently expressed a suspicion of centralized state power as a threat to democracy, and he aired this suspicion even during the welfare state's post-war expansionary phase (which he supported nonetheless). Polyarchy required at least a condition of interest-group pluralism and some type of market economy, so as to adequately decentralize power and decision making. Dahl's theoretical views on this point were thus at odds with prevailing opinion on the left during at least some important moments in his career.

Dahl took seriously—at a time when many socialists did not—the arguments of F. A. Hayek and Ludwig von Mises concerning both the problem of economic calculation under socialism and the central state's threat to the survival of an open society. Dahl's first published article appeared in *Plan Age*, a journal produced by the National Economic and Social Planning Association, whose mission—"the design of methods and formulation of policies for the more effective organization of our society" (TD, xi)—gives some sense of the technocratic, statist orientation that prevailed in the American Left (and in the social sciences) of the 1940s. Dahl's essay rejecting the model of a command economy was at odds with this technocratic-progressivist orthodoxy, endorsing instead the then-novel and lesser-known decentralized market socialism of Oskar Lange and others.

Singly, any of these positions might have served to cast Dahl as antiradical, but his critics have often gone on to draw connections that portray these positions as all of a piece, comprising a broad ideological defense of the liberal-capitalist order. Skinner's argument is an example of this type of critique. It is couched in terms of speech-act philosophy, specifically the insight that ostensibly descriptive labels (e.g., "democracy") in truth perform a normative-evaluative function. In the case of democracy, one might say the word legitimates as well as demarcates.¹¹ Skinner uses this insight to condemn Dahl's positivism, referring to him as an "empirical theorist of democracy" and charging that the "pivot" on which Dahl's theory "swings inescapably in a conservative direction" is his (positivist) commitment "to construct an 'operational' definition of democracy," which leads him, in turn, "to abstract a definition of democracy from the political experience of existing 'polyarchies'" (1973, 300). In other words, according to Skinner, Dahl's positivism dictates that his distinction between democracy and nondemocracy is drawn on the basis of an ideal inspired by the practices of Western-bloc states.¹² Then Skinner connects the Schumpeterian elitist view of democratic

possibilities to Dahl's positivism, noting that the conception of democracy that Dahl abstracts from existing liberal systems is, in fact, overly pessimistic in accepting "the sufficiency of only two criteria for applying the term: that free and regular elections should be held; and that there should be continuous political competition for the people's vote" (*ibid.*) This

guarantees that the existing arrangements of a number of political systems cannot fail to be treated as commendable. For the idea of an operational definition that entails a number of existing polyarchies, notably the United States, cannot fail to embody . . . [Dahl's] minimum version of the democratic ideal. The speech act potential of the term democracy then means that, when it is applied to describe such existing polyarchies, the act of commending their arrangements is thereby performed. (Skinner 1973, 300.)

I offer Skinner's argument here not because it provides a particularly acute ideological characterization of Dahl, but because it shows how critics could plausibly paint him as a (liberal) conservative by linking various of his positions. More important, it illuminates how Dahl's democratic ideal emerges as a kind of immanent construction from his early work taken as a whole.

Dahl as a Consistent Radical

Skinner, and critics like him, are correct in pointing out that many of Dahl's views make his theory hostile to important radical approaches. There are, however, many ways to be a radical. While Dahl's thought may be at odds with prominent modes of left-wing criticism, this does not mean that it is incapable of ultimately generating its own radical-left critique. It is capable of doing so and does, but—as a look at four of Dahl's views may indicate—the starting point for his radicalism lies in a closer-than-usual sympathy with the American political culture of his time.

First, Dahl's rejection of the participatory democrat's ideal as inappropriate in the large nation-state, and (second) his procedural, rights-based definition of democracy, cohere with a liberal and consumerist conception of politics that some have identified as a distinguishing feature of America's public philosophy (Sandel 1996; Hanson 1985, ch. 8). Third, Dahl's positivism resonates with the broader twentieth-century American celebration of technical achievement and scientific reason. And finally, his suspicion of planning and of centralized power has had an even more distinguished pedigree in American political culture, even if somewhat diminished in the immediate postwar period.

In comparison to many other critics of liberal democracy, Dahl, then, is an apologist. At the same time, he offers a vision of his own that implies a deep concern about inequality and an implicit call for a radical restructuring of society in the service of that end. So while Dahl articulates and defends (many of) his culture's political values, he is also a radical critic of its political realities.

The notion that Dahl could at once hold to the basic values of his time and place while still being a radical critic appears paradoxical only, I think, when we have already assumed away the very possibility that immanent critique—or what Charles Taylor (1989) has called "the rhetoric of understanding"—might be radical. Although it may appear at first blush to be of merely semantic importance, the issue of whether Dahl truly deserves to be called radical may reveal a common predisposition toward one mode of social criticism. That is, the tendency to deny Dahl this appellation may stem not only from his stands on a handful of normative and methodological matters, but more deeply on an implicit rejection of Walzer's claim (mentioned earlier) that "radical detachment [is] . . . not a prerequisite of social criticism, not even of radical social criticism" (1987, 37).

Even many of Dahl's critics have been willing to reappraise his ideological credentials based on his work of the past 20 to 30 years. David Held (1987, 201ff) and John

F. Manley (1983), for example, have helped propagate the view that Dahl's thought has progressed through two distinct phases—that there were essentially two Dahls: an early, complacent pluralist theorist, and a later "neo-pluralist" who finally came to appreciate the force of the Marxian-left critique of his earlier views. According to Manley (1983, 369), Dahl's radicalism first expressed itself in his essays from the late 1970s and in *Dilemmas of Pluralist Democracy*: "The persistence of inflation and unemployment," Manley writes, "the forced retrenchment of the so-called welfare state, and the deepening of gross inequalities . . . have moved such leading pluralists as Dahl . . . far to the left." Carole Pateman similarly characterizes Dahl's intellectual trajectory, but instead points to his *After the Revolution?* (1970) as the moment in which he effected a "radical modification" of his theory, in a "significant concession" to his critics (1973, 216; see also Schwartz 1991, 314). Such "two Dahls theses" have become the conventional wisdom.

But Dahl is not a late-blooming radical. Neither has he moved decisively away from any of the four positions that contributed to his reputation as a straightforward liberal-democratic apologist.

Dahl, for one, resists the idea that he underwent a mid-career shift to the left. Denying that he regards "intellectual consistency over a long life as necessarily a virtue," he nonetheless attests to seeing "more consistency in my work, taken as a whole, than some of my readers evidently do" (TD, 7-8).

Indeed, at times I feel almost embarrassed when I consider how many of the major themes and orientations in my later work were already present in my completed Ph.D. dissertation! . . . I find it both fascinating and puzzling that even some friendly critics see *A Preface to Democratic Theory and Who Governs?* as somehow at odds with my other work. I do not. (Ibid.)

Where many have perceived an ideological shift, the Dahl of the 1970s—building on the same positions, and thus

continuing to reflect prominent values of his political culture—was simply elaborating a vision of political radicalism toward which he had long been predisposed. But at about that time (the 1970s), Dahl's authorial voice became markedly more straightforward in advancing his normative aims in programmatic terms.

It is undeniable that such books as *A Preface to Democratic Theory* (1956) and *Who Governs?* (1961)—along with the essays he wrote through much of the 1960s—are colored by a substantive normative perspective. Still, those writings were offered primarily as works of analysis and description. By contrast, *After the Revolution?* (1971), along with *Dilemmas of Pluralist Democracy* (1982), *A Preface to Economic Democracy* (1985), much of *Democracy and Its Critics* (1989), and the bulk of his essays of the same period, unmistakably articulate full-throated normative prescriptions. It is most accurate to see this not as an ideological shift at all, but as a natural progression on Dahl's part from using a radical orientation as a basis for description toward using a radical vision as the basis for prescription. Specifically, one is left with the impression that a clear, confident assertion of Dahl's radical values awaited the maturity of his analysis of modern conditions, particularly the refinement of his understanding of modern "polyarchy." Ultimately, the form that Dahl's radicalism takes is dictated by his sense of the possibilities and limitations inherent in large-scale modern democracies. A deepening of democracy could be achieved either by exploiting more fully the potentialities of polyarchy, or by supplementing polyarchal democracy with sites for collective decision making that are not subject to its inherent limitations.

The Content of Dahl's Radicalism

By including many important early essays, *Towards Democracy* reveals that the ideal of economic democracy—far from originating in a post-pluralist "turn" in the 1970s or 1980s—was a consistent, if somewhat inchoate,

presence in Dahl's thought from the start. The three early publications that are drawn from Dahl's 1940 Yale dissertation—"On the Theory of Democratic Socialism," "Marxism and Free Parties," and "Workers' Control of Industry and the British Labor Party"—present the main features of a political radicalism that would fully blossom only after he had sized up the democratic possibilities and limitations of polyarchy.

The first of these essays (TD, ch. 29) offers an extended criticism of central-state socialism and an argument for the superiority—primarily due to its greater compatibility with democracy—of a decentralized, market socialism. Better than either "authoritarian socialism" or capitalism, Dahl concludes, market socialism "can satisfy a number of aspirations: the desire for worker-control in management, the collective supervision of the economy by the democratic state, an expanding economy, full employment"—and what is more, it can do these things while permitting "the extensive decentralization of power and control that is a necessity of democratic practices" (TD, 583).

The second essay, originally published on the centenary of *The Communist Manifesto*, faults Marx and Engels for producing an antidemocratic form of socialism. According to Dahl, Marxism fails as an adequate theory of democratic socialism by presuming to have solved the riddle of political conflict. By assuming "that group conflict stems from a class structure, which by definition is eliminated when social ownership is completely substituted for private ownership," Marxism neglects to provide any philosophical support for—among other things—majority rule, tolerance of pluralism, or political parties (TD, 273).¹³

The third essay drawn from Dahl's dissertation identifies the British Labour party's fateful rejection of

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Peter Berkowitz, George Mason University School of Law, Fairfax VA 22032, the author of *Virtue and the Making of Modern Liberalism* (Princeton, 1999), and *Nietzsche: The Ethics of an Immoralist* (Harvard, 1995), a founding co-director of the Jerusalem Program on Constitutional Govern-

worker self-management in favor of Fabian elitism in the late 1930s and early 1940s as another significant anti-democratic moment in socialist history (TD, ch. 30). The intraparty debate preceding this move illustrates a larger fact about socialist thought: it has "long contained two potentially contradictory doctrines concerning the control or management of productive enterprises under a socialist regime." One doctrine was "the idea of worker's control, the concept that under socialism workers will no longer be merely passive victims of the productive process, but direct participants in the control of productive enterprises." The other was "the idea of central control on behalf of the entire community" (TD, 585, *emph. original*). As between these two socialist ideals, it is clear where Dahl's loyalties lay.

Each of these early works show Dahl engaged in a searching criticism of socialism motivated by a concern that it be achieved in a decentralized way consistent with democracy.¹⁴ If his very first essays are explorations of problems within socialism, subsequent writings adopt a more detached, often functionalist¹⁵ tone (e.g., TD, chs. 31, 40, 42). Still these early essays, too, show a Dahl who—contrary to critics' charges—was sensitive to the dilemma of unequal political resources and to the presence of privileged groups within the pluralist system. In an essay from 1955, for instance, he identifies the business corporation as the prime example of the kind of hierarchical structure—resistant to democratic control—that marks American society.

Here, as elsewhere in writings of this period (e.g., TD, ch. 55), Dahl relies on the analyses of radical economists Adolf Berle and Gardiner Means. Beginning in the 1930s, they had warned against the dangers of accelerating economic concentration in America, accompanied by the emergence of a corporate-managerial class that was increasingly exhibiting its autonomy from both owner-shareholders and the broader public. Thus, in an essay published the year before his ostensibly complacent plu-

ralist classic, *A Preface to Democratic Theory*, Dahl writes:

The fact is, I think, that at the moment we do not quite know our way out of this dilemma. It is perfectly clear that business corporations will exercise decisive influence on the second half of the twentieth century, at least within the United States, and therefore indirectly on the whole world. It is not at all clear how this influence will be controlled by the American society and used more or less within the limits set by the dominant values of the greater number of adults in the society. (TD, 819.)

Along the same lines, Dahl in 1959 (TD, ch. 55) urges political scientists to initiate a serious scrutiny of business corporations (both their internal structure of governance and their influence on the external political system), while another essay of the same year shows him still concerned with the problems of achieving "collective decisions about economic matters" in the context of complex, modern societies (TD, 616).

Dahl's Socialism

The advocacy of worker-managed market socialism in Dahl's earliest essays (those drawn from his dissertation), along with his subsequent critique of the business corporation as an obstacle to American democracy, crystallize into a full-blown radical vision by the late 1960s and early 1970s. In *After the Revolution?* Dahl—adopting a fatherly second-person voice—addresses the New Left and the "somewhat worrisome" fact "that during the course of the last few years, revolution has swiftly become an in-word in the United States" (1970, 3).¹⁶ Careless talk of an American participatory democracy is hopelessly and unhelpfully romantic, given the inherent limitations of polyarchal democracy. As if to establish his radical credentials with youthful readers, however, he offers an alternative vision, which includes calls for greater wealth and income redistribution; the establish-

ment of a worker-managed corporate economy; and the empowerment of local governments, especially at the neighborhood and medium-sized city levels, to serve as venues where a more fully participatory form of democracy might realistically be practiced (1970, ch. 3).

Dahl had already articulated the last of these three elements¹⁷ in his 1967 American Political Science Association presidential address, "The City in the Future of Democracy" (TD, ch. 21)—a work every bit as radical, in its own quiet way, as *After the Revolution?* In the presidential address he urges his colleagues to take up the idea of recreating city democracy, "only consistent this time with the imperatives of modern technology, the existence of representative governments ruling over huge populations and territories, and the extension of constitutionalism and the rule of law to vast areas of the earth—ultimately, perhaps, to the globe itself" (TD, 414). In these modern "democratic cities," citizens—while not likely to achieve the Aristotelian ideal of ruling and being ruled in turn—might exhibit "a degree of participation so great and so fairly spread about that no one feels neglected and everyone feels, with justice, that his viewpoint has been pretty fairly attended to" (*ibid.*, 414).

It is wrong to think that the A.P.S.A. address is concerned only with reinvigorating city-sized democracy, however. This speech represents Dahl's first effort to think beyond the scale of the nation-state, and thus to speculate about how the operation of polyarchal democracy might be deepened and supplemented through the creation of institutions that are both smaller and larger. Dahl urges that political scientists "begin to think about appropriate units of democracy as an ascending series, a set of Chinese boxes, each larger and more inclusive than the other, each in some sense democratic, though not always in quite the same sense, and each not inherently less nor inherently more legitimate than the other" (TD, 393). If more participatory subnational democratic sites are needed, so is the extension of democracy to interna-

tional decision-making processes. "In any case," according to Dahl,

it would surely be a sign of hubris to assert that the ideals and institutions of democracy have reached or will reach their final destination, and their fulfillment, in the nation-state. (Ibid., 387.)

Hence, every day it becomes "more reasonable to see the nation-state as a transitory historic form, to foresee that the nation-state will some day cease to exist as an autonomous unit, just as the city-state did" (ibid.) when democracy underwent its second transformation.

A comprehensive radical vision—shaped by dissatisfaction with nation-state democracy—emerges out of both *After the Revolution?* and Dahl's A.P.S.A. address. It is radical because of the deep structural and cultural changes it would require in pursuit of a more perfect democracy—including a rejection of the traditional American liberal distinction between public and private spheres. At the same time, Dahl's ultimate justification for democracy remains recognizably liberal in character; democracy is called for because of our commitment to the principle of equality of interests, conjoined with an acceptance of the antipaternalist proviso that "in the absence of a compelling showing to the contrary an adult is assumed to understand his or her interest better than another" (TD, 426-27; cf. TD, 84).¹⁸ The presumption against paternalistically second-guessing an adult's perception of her interests helps Dahl fend off the meritocratic or guardianship alternative to democracy, which he considers "the greatest challenge to democracy, both historically and in the present world" (ibid., 69). This presumption also, I believe, contributes to a general reluctance on Dahl's part to question existing preferences, even when those preferences work against the enactment of his vision and democracy's perfection.

Dahl's radicalism may be rooted in values immanent in his political culture, but he has chosen to emphasize some of his culture's values rather than others. This is what

provides him with the critical distance from the status quo that makes his vision truly radical. Dahl ultimately places greater stress on the ideal of collective decision making, and less on other values—particularly those implicated in wealth creation, higher living standards, and material consumption. His guiding ideal, the notion of "procedural democracy," is, he acknowledges, founded on a view that gives "priority to political ends over economic ends, to liberty equality and justice over efficiency, prosperity and growth" (TD, 740).

In the modern world, Dahl believes, polyarchy is necessary but not sufficient for a genuinely democratic society—one that more perfectly instantiates this equality of interest-bearing individuals. Increasingly, problems will present themselves at the supranational level, while other issues would best be addressed in smaller-scale democratic units that offer citizens greater opportunities for effective and roughly equal participation. Supranational governance is called for because technological development increasingly generates problems (e.g., pollution and arms control) that are beyond the reach or concern of any one nation-state. But again, a thoroughgoing commitment to the equality of interest-bearing individuals, according to Dahl, means that policies addressing such problems should be arrived at democratically; the same logic that justifies democratic processes in the nation-state applies to the processes of international organizations.

Besides justifying this institutional set of democratic "Chinese boxes," the logic of democracy also applies to the economic structures within any given nation-state. The largest economic structures, at least, should be opened to direct, collective direction, thereby reducing the material and political inequalities that mark the social context of polyarchy, and extending the activity of self-government to the workaday world, closer to most citizens.

The call for economic or workplace democracy is the central element in Dahl's prescription. Workplace

democracy, like the empowerment of subnational democratic fora, would serve to enrich polyarchy by providing new participatory opportunities to the average citizen. Even more than participation in local government, it would "extend democracy to a crucial sphere of life where a great many persons are subject to hierarchic controls" and would "help to distribute the gains from property ownership more widely" (TD, 550). In doing so it would "come closer than any other feasible system . . . to the Jeffersonian ideal of a democracy in which a wide distribution of property and economic independence would help to create a body of substantially equal citizens" (ibid.). The cause of equality would also be advanced, since it is to be expected that worker-managers would radically flatten the huge wage differentials that mark corporate capitalism (Dahl 1985, 106).

Not only can the workplace-democracy element of his vision be traced back to the very beginning of Dahl's career, but it is in its support that he develops his most sustained arguments in later years, culminating in a book-length treatment in *A Preface to Economic Democracy*. He provides no similarly extended treatment of either sub-national or international democracy, even if he does take up these themes again and again in his essays. His advocacy of workplace democracy is also the most recognizably radical feature of his vision, accounting for his reputation as a late-blooming, radicalized pluralist democrat, or "neo-pluralist" (Held 1987, ch. 6). With his (renewed) call for economic democracy, Dahl's voice joined a chorus of left democratic theorists who were alive to such schemes in the 1970s and early 1980s¹⁹

Dahl's plan for workplace democracy, like his vision more generally, is both radical and immanent. By asserting his vision, Dahl is, in effect, asking the (polyarchal) citizenry of the United States to use its currently unexploited political resources to assume a much greater—and more direct—role in collective self-rule. He is asking Americans to become more political, and to claim for themselves more of the political responsibilities that are

routinely delegated to elites under a strictly polyarchal system. Although he does not dwell on it, the realization of worker democracy would entail a breathtaking restructuring of American government and society, regardless of which of the various incarnations of his argument is considered—his advocacy of Oskar Lange's "factor market" socialism in his first publication, the brief argument presented in *After the Revolution?*, or the more elaborate account in *A Preface to Economic Democracy*.

Most basically, the reigning conception of property rights would be drastically revised; private ownership rights would be abridged so as to fully accommodate the needs of the larger public. Dahl's view of property rights as inferior to the political rights of collective self-government (TD, 744-46) is consistent with the view expressed in the famous footnote 4 of the U.S. Supreme Court's *Carolene Products Co. v. United States* decision (1938), but his view goes beyond any subordination of the status of property rights that the Court, or the broader American political culture, has yet accepted.

The Supreme Court was merely arguing that the judiciary has less warrant to protect property rights than to protect the integrity of electoral-democratic processes, and that the definition and protection of property rights should instead be left up to legislatures created by those democratic processes. Dahl (TD, 746), on the other hand, argues for the American polyarchy to positively assert its right of self-government at the expense of traditionally conceived private-property rights. By recognizing the "absurdities in extending Locke on private property to ownership or control of the modern business corporation" (*ibid.*), the American public should accept the view that

any large economic enterprise is in principle a public enterprise. It exists not by private right but only to meet social goals. Questions about these social goals, and the comparative advantages and disadvantages of different forms, are properly in the public domain, matters for public discussion, choice and decision, to be

determined collectively by processes that satisfy the criteria of procedural democracy. (Ibid., 746-747.)

In other words, a regime of strict property rights may be appropriate for small-scale capitalism, but not for modern, corporate capitalism. Large organizations, especially corporations in which ownership rights have effectively been detached from actual managerial control, should no longer be treated as private at all.

A leitmotif in Dahl's work is his insistence on the importance of size or scale. Modern nation-state democracy—polyarchy—is democracy practiced on a new, grander scale. It requires different principles, because it offers different possibilities and labors under different limitations than smaller-scale democracy. Size is decisive in the matter of property rights as well. Once again, this view has a distant analog in American constitutional jurisprudence—particularly in *Munn v. Illinois*'s (1877) notion that state regulation is justified when a business activity is prominent enough that it becomes "affected with a public interest." But Dahl, in providing the legal/moral basis for his vision of workplace democracy, would use that basis to justify more than regulation when it comes to large business. In his hands, it would justify a major alteration in the assignment of property rights and effective control.

Though workplace democracy is central, all three elements of Dahl's vision are connected by his desire to move both the theory and the practice of modern democracy radically beyond its polyarchal form. Unlike nationalist, conservative, or communitarian arguments for federalism, an embrace of participatory ideals and a search for their proper outlet fuels Dahl's call for subnational democracy. His arguments for supranational democracy are likewise motivated not by a neoliberal desire to facilitate world markets, but by a concern to maintain justice and collective political control in the face of a seemingly inexorable process of international, and even global, integration. Given these close connections, it is instructive to look briefly at some significant problems that beset

these affiliated elements of his vision before considering the fate of his call for workplace democracy.

The Failure of Dahl's Radical Vision

Since Dahl's theory of polyarchy itself was founded on a clear-eyed recognition of the ways in which size constrains democracy, it is not surprising that his initial hopes for a "third transformation" of democracy (from the nation-state to the international level) soon cooled. Contrary to the spirit of his A.P.S.A. address, in 1982 the focus of Dahl's theorizing returned squarely to the nation-state. In *Dilemmas of Pluralist Democracy* (1982, 16), he observed that "no unit larger than a country is likely to be as democratically governed as a modern polyarchy." The following year, however, he signaled that this situation may merely be a contingent one, since as a matter of "purely theoretical reasoning from democratic principles, it appears to be impossible to establish that the city-state, the country, a transnational system, or any other unit is inherently more democratic or otherwise more desirable than others" (TD, 427.).

A dozen years later, Dahl allowed that "a sort of transnational polyarchy might gradually come into existence" in the European Union, even if elsewhere the requisite "political structures and consciousness are likely to remain weak in the foreseeable future" (TD, 438). Later still, he deemed it "highly unlikely" that international political parties, a sense of broader civic membership, and other "crucial requirements for the democratization of international organizations" (1998, 117) will develop, so that while "democratic processes may occasionally set the outside limits within which the elites strike their bargains, to call the political practices of international systems 'democratic' would be to rob the term of all its meaning" (*ibid.*).

In these passages, spanning the early 1980s through the late 1990s, Dahl hesitantly retreats from a positive vision for democracy at the supranational level, as his

principles—hemmed in by his acceptance of the “law of time and numbers” (1998, 109)—continue to inform his negative attitude toward these unfortunately necessary international institutions. At one time Dahl’s critics may have felt that he risked overlegitimizing the West’s liberal regimes by using his concept of polyarchy to distinguish them from their rivals. Such a move seemingly amounted to a kind of complacency about regimes that the critics felt were far from authentically democratic. Dahl, in his very latest writings, has come to express a strictly analogous concern about international organizations, which—he now states quite definitively—“we should openly recognize . . . will not be democratic” (1999, 23). Given this view, associating the practices and institutions of international organizations too closely with the ideals of democracy is not only mistaken but dangerous. There is “no reason to clothe international organizations in the mantle of democracy simply in order to provide them with greater legitimacy” (*ibid.*, 32), since doing so would diminish the odds that national leaders and citizens will maintain a proper wariness toward them.

If the processes that Dahl initially envisioned as ushering in a “third transformation” of democracy instead appear increasingly likely to “lead not to an extension of the democratic idea beyond the nation-state but to the victory in that domain of *de facto* guardianship” (1989, 320), the strengthening of subnational democracy forms part of the solution. The failure of democracy at the supranational level “need not lead inevitably to a widening sense of powerlessness provided citizens can exercise significant control over decisions on the smaller scale of matters” surrounding local policy (e.g., streets, parks, schools, and city planning). The existing American system of federalism cannot work in these terms, however, because its primary subnational units “are too big to allow for much in the way of civic participation” and are “infinitely less important to citizens of that state than any democratic nation-state to its citizens” (TD, 411). The city is the appropriate arena for participatory democracy—not the

province or the nation-state. So democratic theorists need to reconsider and reformulate federalism as a legitimate and increasingly relevant mechanism for furthering democracy (TD, ch. 22).

The Failure of the People to Be Politicized

It is ironic that Dahl would turn so hopefully to the modern city only six years after publishing an empirical analysis of a contemporary medium-sized city in *Who Governs?* There, he had found that New Haven—with a 1950 population of 164,443 (1961, 329)—exhibited a pluralist, elite-led politics that, in its relatively low levels of citizen engagement and participation, was a microcosm of polyarchal democracy. The typical citizen of New Haven, Dahl had noted, was a largely apolitical *Homo civicus*; only an exceptional few could be counted among the active or attentive *Homo politicus* (*ibid.*, ch. 19). With this characterization of the citizenry, Dahl moves beyond his standard argument that time inexorably limits participation in large-scale democracy and embraces the Schumpeterian view that most people simply do not prefer political participation, even if time for their deliberative contributions were available. "It would clear the air of a good deal of cant," according to Dahl (*ibid.*, 279),

if instead of assuming that politics is a normal and natural concern of human beings, one were to make the contrary assumption that whatever lip service citizens may pay to conventional attitudes, politics is a remote, alien, and unrewarding activity. Instead of seeking to explain why citizens are not interested, concerned, and active, the task is to explain why a few citizens are.

To be sure, New Haven's political system, like that of the United States generally, was not dominated by any "power elite"; the competition of interest-group pluralism helped assure this, as did the fact that "even *Homo civicus* (under the prodding of rival political leaders) can be counted on to rise briefly out of his preoccupation with

apolitical goals and employ some of his resources to smite down the political man who begins to deviate noticeably" from the legal-democratic norms of the political culture (1961, 226). Still, such a system of "minorities rule" (1956, 132) is hardly ideal (democratically) and is a far cry from the vision of the "democratic city" Dahl invokes in his A.P.S.A. address. The fact that New Haven falls so neatly within the population range of "somewhere between 50,000 and 200,000" that he estimates as optimal for the realization of the great democratic city (TD, 406) only underlines the distance standing between participatory reality and his aspirations. It also suggests that—above and beyond the effects of what might be called the "natural" limitations of size and time—it is the typical citizen's "preoccupation with apolitical goals" that prevents the deepening of polyarchy into a richer form of democracy. This failure—resulting from citizens' value choices rather than any inherent structural limitations—resembles the failure of international-level democracy in that both outcomes are contingent states of affairs; neither are dictated by anything in the logic of Dahl's theory.

Dahl does not so much as mention New Haven when extolling the democratic possibilities of the medium-sized city in his A.P.S.A. address—or in any of his subsequent presentations of this theme. Although the incompatibility of New Haven's reality with his vision calls out for explanation, Dahl has surprisingly little to say about it. What he does say seems strangely ambivalent, since he is typically reluctant to criticize citizens' apolitical preferences, even implying a certain sympathy with them. If his vision of extending democratic practice to the workplace and to participatory subnational venues is to be more than merely utopian speculation, however, it would seem incumbent upon him to uncover the causes of this pervasive apoliticism and explain how, and on what basis, liberal citizens can be expected to abandon it so as to create and embrace the kinds of richly democratic institutions he proposes.

Lest it be thought that the characterization Dahl pro-

vides in *Who Governs?* is either an aberration or a reflection of the younger Dahl's greater skepticism or conservatism, it should be noted that a 1992 essay presents the very same image of "occasional, intermittent, or part-time citizens," for whom "politics is not the center of their daily lives" and of whom "one might wonder why it should be" (TD, 215). In fact, though, Dahl's own vision would require that citizens make politics, if not exactly the center of their daily lives, certainly a much more significant part of them than they now prefer. If he cannot see why politics should be so important to the typical citizen—or at least how it could be made to seem important—then he will not be able to discern a political path to his radicalized democracy, and in any case it becomes unclear why that should be our goal.

The Democrat's Dilemma

The theoretical bind Dahl seems to be in is this: his radicalism consists of a desire for democracy and its associated values to be a substantially heightened presence in the lives of modern citizens. Opportunities for democratic activity should be manifold and ready at hand for all. Yet the very argument that Dahl relies upon to justify democracy, particularly as against guardianship, pivots on an antipaternalist deference to existing preferences, expressed in his claim that "in the absence of a compelling showing to the contrary an adult is assumed to understand his or her interest better than another" (TD, 426-27). Americans, at least, currently show no great likelihood of preferring—in any great number—institutions, such as workplace democracy, that would radically deepen and enrich polyarchy, particularly if it would entail the sacrifice of some significant level of the material wealth, economic growth, and military security that people do value. A motivational deficit, then, looms over Dahl's hopes for the perfection of collective self-government. Unless prompted by some economic or military crisis, or by an acute sense of injustice, most Americans—and probably

most citizens of liberal consumer societies elsewhere are not likely to want to exert their energies in completing the journey to which TD's subtitle refers—nor, according to Dahl's antipaternalist premises, should they.

While by no means giving an adequate exploration of it, Dahl at least acknowledges the problem presented by existing preferences in *After the Revolution?*, where he again underscores citizens' limited political interest (1970, 42-48). Dahl reminds his readers that in choosing political participation, the citizen necessarily forgoes other values. An individual's participation in politics is thus costly; their "time might be used in doing something else—often, in fact, something a great deal more interesting and important" (1970, 44). Those interested in deepening democracy tend to forget this simple truth because, "like other performers (including teachers, ministers, and actors), politicians and political activists are prone to overestimate the interest of the audience in their performance" (ibid.). It follows that any serious call for participatory democracy must take into account the likely preference ordering of citizens. More often than democratic idealists would like to admit, citizens will find the opportunity costs of direct participation simply too high and will prefer apolitical pursuits instead.

The Myth of Homo Politicus

Some brief remarks in *After the Revolution?* are about as close as Dahl ever comes to an examination of the political situation presented by the relative scarcity of Homo politicus. The American working class cannot be expected to lead the call for a democratic restructuring, because "along with the officialdom of the trade union movement," the worker is "deeply ingrained with the old private property view of economic enterprise" (1970, 134). Furthermore, "affluent American workers, like affluent workers in many advanced countries and the middle class everywhere, tend to be consumption-oriented, acquisitive, privatistic, and family-centered," leaving "little

place for a passionate aspiration toward effective citizenship in the enterprise (or perhaps even in the state!)" (ibid., 134-35).²⁰

With this in mind, Dahl (ibid., 110) colorfully concludes that the "greatest obstacle to democratization" in the United States

is not that bugbear with which the Left, old and new, is invariably so obsessed, an elite of wealthy men, or even that military-industrial complex so much referred to these days, but rather the military-industrial-financial-labor-farming-educational-professional-consumer-over and under thirty-lower/middle/upper class complex, that, for want of a more appropriate name, might be called the American people.

Dahl makes this claim while acknowledging that genuine and persistent inequalities can, and do, discourage "the American people" from assuming a greater role and pushing their democracy beyond polyarchy. He does not deny that forces counter to further democratization exist. Still, "in advanced industrial or postindustrial societies, particularly if they are governed by polyarchies," political resources are available to citizens of all means (ibid., 109). These resources are great compared with those available at other historical moments, when people achieved spectacular democratic transformations. The resources available to the majority are certainly adequate to construct participatory democracy in the workplace and in cities; so responsibility for democracy's incompleteness must lie with the people. There are no insurmountable objective barriers. The truly significant barriers are subjective ones.

Dahl returns to this point in the opening lines of his important essay, "On Removing Certain Impediments to Democracy in the United States" (1977). It is, he says, "our consciousness, both individual and collective" (TD, 729), that is deficient and that should be blamed for the democratic shortcomings of the United States. "With a people, as with a person," he avers, "it is a sign of wis-

dom and maturity to understand and accept limits that are imposed by nature's laws and the scarcity of resources But to accept as real, limits that are imposed only by our minds, is not wisdom but self-inflicted blindness" (ibid., *emph. added*).

Certainly many democratic theorists would part company with Dahl's view that the major impediments to further democratization lie only in the minds of polyarchy's citizens.²¹ This difference of opinion can probably be related, in part, to the decades-old debate over the status of polyarchy and to Dahl's long-standing insistence that it represents a legitimate-if incomplete-democratic achievement.

To hold that polyarchy is self-limiting, that substantial structural impediments or elite resistance can effectively bar the further democratic progress of the citizens of polyarchies, would be to signal not only the utopianism of Dahl's hopes for a third transformation, but also perhaps the fundamental hollowness of the second transformation's realization (in the form of polyarchy).

At some moments, Dahl himself seems to imply such a view, such as when he refers to an "extraordinary ideological sleight of hand" by which America's nineteenth-century regime of strong private property rights, "which in the agrarian order made good sense morally and politically, was shifted over intact to corporate enterprise" (TD, 737). If this "transfer of the Lockean view to the corporation" (ibid., 738) really was effected by sleight of hand, then it does seem that something other than the people's own minds is at work in limiting democracy's reach.

But elsewhere in the same essay Dahl provides a more benign image of a late nineteenth-century America in which a number of alternatives to the new order-agrarianism, anarchism, socialism, individually owned consumers' and producers' cooperatives, selective government ownership, economic regulation, limits on corporate size, monetary schemes, enforced competition, and many others—were put forward, fairly debated, and finally

pretty much defeated (TD, 731). At the end of this process, in the twentieth century, the United States was left with a political culture distinguished by its "ideological narrowness" (1970, 119) and a citizenry operating "with a patch over one eye and myopia in the other," unable to "see the whole range of possibilities" (ibid., 118) for a modern economy, including options such as worker control.

But if ideological sleight-of-hand didn't prevent the vigorous consideration of the alternatives that were put forward in the last decades of the nineteenth century, then Dahl has no account of why they were rejected and the new corporate order was embraced. Even more problematic is the fact that Dahl discusses America's inability to move beyond polyarchal democracy solely in ideational terms, as the product of a clash of philosophies from which an eventually hegemonic "historical commitment" (ibid., 730) emerged. This is surely an excessively rationalistic picture. It leaves out serious consideration of the "c o n s u m p t i o n - oriented, acquisitive, privatistic and family-centered" passions that were at least noted in *After The Revolution*? All of Dahl's discussions of the failure of citizens to embrace economic democracy after 1970 approach the problem as an ideational one, distinct from the issue of desire.

By and large, Dahl seems to assume that if American citizens were only made aware of the possibility of worker self-management, they would embrace it. But at least as important as the presentation of ideals—and of ideologies—are the passions, emotions, customs, and habits through which an individual adopts one manner of life, with its attendant value-orientation, rather than another. Political theorists may construct arguments demonstrating the seeming coherence or consistency of a life that includes political participation in the workplace and the local community, but unless citizens palpably detect something satisfying about such participation, they are likely to remain unmoved, and the theory is likely to

remain utopian (as well as incoherent, if it rests ultimately on the people's right to choose whatever they desire).

The relationship between ideology and motivating passions is a complex one, to be sure. Certainly citizens' desires are shaped or formed by the reigning ideology of their native political culture. On the other hand, their desires just as surely determine the attractiveness any given ideology will hold for them, and the likelihood of its acceptance by an individual or collectivity. At the very least, Dahl's theory should explore how existing social and political structures might predispose individuals either to value or to discount political participation. While Dahl has doggedly asserted—against romantic democrats—the limitations that time and numbers (of citizens) exert on potential participation, and has even remarked on the common predisposition of polyarchal citizens to apoliticism, he has never really addressed the effects of structural differentiation—especially as generated by the complex division of labor that characterizes modern society—on a citizen's tendency to participate, or even to obtain political knowledge and understanding.²² Certainly, he has not pursued this issue as it pertains to his radical aspirations. Thus, Philip Green (1979, 354) is right to charge that Dahl "has not perceived the necessity for a structural account of why some people voluntarily become *Homo politicus* and others do not."

That is not to say that the Marxist-inspired approach that Green (1985) adopts for his own structural account is correct. Green blames the capitalist class structure for inducing differential political motivation in polyarchies, but it seems likely that the problem is a deeper one, not just a matter of capitalism versus socialism. Any economy attempting to take advantage of efficiencies of specialization and social differentiation would likely generate differentials of political power and motivation, to some degree. Niklas Luhmann (1982) even suggests that the public/private ownership distinctions that economic democracy would try to transcend are in fact required for

the maintenance of some degree of freedom in the context of modern social differentiation. Unfortunately, Dahl engages none of these problems.

A related lacuna in Dahl's theory lies in its failure to confront what Benjamin Constant ([1819] 1988) recognized as a distinctive "liberty of the moderns"—the "enjoyment of security in private pleasures" (ibid., 317). The appeal of this enjoyment may not conflict with the achievement of polyarchy, if, as Constant indicates, moderns achieve their liberty in "the guarantees accorded by institutions to these pleasures" (ibid.). However, modern liberty and the perfection of democratic practices may be perceived as mutually exclusive rival goods once citizens have become comfortable with their achievement of guarantees, or protections, under polyarchy. Unfortunately, as Dahl refines his call for a radicalization of democratic practices in *A Preface to Economic Democracy*, he reframes his argument in a way that only further obscures the problem that apolitical preferences pose. The argument in *After the Revolution?* for workplace democracy (along with the other elements of Dahl's radical vision) proceeds along broadly consequentialist lines. Workers' control and a socialist market are justified because the society that incorporates them has, arguably, made the best tradeoffs—e.g., between the desire for efficiency, self-government, and the claims of competence (1970, 104). A few years later, when Dahl revisits his plan for workplace democracy in *A Preface to Economic Democracy* (see also TD, ch. 33), he offers "a stronger justification, with a more Kantian flavor," according to which "if democracy is justified in governing the state, it must also be justified in governing economic enterprises; and to say that it is not justified in governing economic enterprises is to imply that it is not justified in governing the state" (TD, 643). But exactly how is this argument a "stronger" one? It is logically more systematic, perhaps, and certainly more dogmatic, but its rigid structure serves only to cloud the issue of existing preferences and of any potential political transition to a deepened democ-

racy. The "Kantian" argument is more forceful, but also more hermetic and utopian. In fact, the later approach is not so much a new argument as it is a narrowing of the old one. Dahl here excludes consideration of the principles he saw as competing with the tenet of autonomous self-rule in *After the Revolution*? No real tradeoffs are admitted since a near-value monism is asserted. Philosophers may indulge in such arguments, but citizens typically lead their lives in pursuit of many values and goods. An individual life, like the politics of a community, involves a constant process of comparison and mutual adjustment between competing values, and if individuals, as citizens, are entitled to indulge their preferences, regardless of the consequences, then why should they follow Dahl in "preferring" autonomy to everything else?

Participatory Democracy vs. Reality

The two volumes of *Toward Democracy* are most valuable in tracing the genealogy of Dahl's fundamental concepts and commitments, and in providing some clues as to why his often-unnoticed radicalism takes on an increasingly utopian character over time. But the fate of Dahl's vision—its failure to connect with the politics of recent decades and, hence, its moribund and internally inconsistent condition—is not a unique one. The high hopes expressed by many in the 1970s and early 1980s for a blossoming of democracy beyond the boundaries of the traditional liberal state, particularly in the workplace, have largely been disappointed.

The problems I have identified as internal to Dahl's theory are clearly not the whole story. The ideal of worker-managed market socialism has suffered broader setbacks attributable to political and intellectual trends in both the former Eastern bloc and in the West. In trying to understand this broader failure, I believe there are some important lessons to be learned from Dahl's case. Conversely, recent developments in the wider world of market socialism provide additional considerations useful

to anyone wishing to assess the viability and attractiveness of Dahl's theory. The lessons, so to speak, can be drawn in both directions.

Recent trends related to worker-managed market socialism provide reasons for pessimism about the economic and political efficacy of Dahl's vision. While sympathetic theorists continue to hold up worker management as a democratic ideal, and some even continue to provide new arguments for it (e.g., Howard 2000; Ellerman 1990; Bardhan and Roemer 1994), the enthusiasm of the literature of the 1970s and early 1980s, to which Dahl contributed, has significantly moderated since that time as a number of analysts have expressed second thoughts. In his study of the political effects of plywood cooperatives in the United States—especially the effects of participation in co-ops on workers' political attitudes—Edward Greenberg (1986, 169) somewhat reluctantly concludes that his findings "must surely disappoint the hopes and expectations of democratic Left advocates of workplace democracy." A study of urban cooperatives in Israel (Russell 1995) reaches similarly negative conclusions. More significant, perhaps, is an examination of the widely touted Mondragón cooperatives of Spain that portrays the Basque region's enterprises as virtual Potemkin villages (Kasimir 1996). Like Greenberg and Russell, Sharryn Kasimir comes to the subject from an initially sympathetic left-wing orientation, but while Dahl had held up Mondragón along with the plywood cooperatives as "stunning successes" (1985, 131), a decade later Kasimir finds a largely apathetic workforce that fails to identify with the cooperative, and that is subject to manipulation by a self-generated "managerial" class.

Dahl (1985, ch. 4) also looked hopefully to the Meidner Plan, a proposal advanced in the 1970s to provide financing to individual worker-governed firms through Swedish national tax receipts. The plan was intended, in part, to help counter the often-recognized tendency of worker-managed firms to favor wage increases and job retention over needed capital reinvestment and workforce expan-

sion—the so-called “self-extinction forces” (Gunn 1984, 47) to which such firms are prone. Unfortunately, the Swedish Social Democrats failed to endorse the Meidner plan and it never became part of the Swedish model (Silverman 1998, 70).

Events in the former Eastern bloc may have had an even greater impact than any of these developments on democratic theorists’ enthusiasm for worker management. Hungarian economist János Kornai—the “one living economist who could claim to have influenced the minds of a whole generation living under communism,” according to Daniel Yergin and Joseph Stanislaw (1998, 281)—describes his own intellectual journey away from the market-socialist third way as resulting not from any purely economic or abstract argumentation: instead, “what changed many of our minds was a series of political traumas and disillusionments” (Kornai 1995, 29). According to Kornai, the ultimately fatal problems of market socialism are problems of political economy, rather than economic vision; they become apparent largely in the “realization” stage, as political incentives and tendencies show themselves, playing havoc with normative and economic theory. Dahl’s endorsement of market socialism is predicated on his belief that it would decentralize power in a way that is consistent with democratic freedom. Kornai, in contrast, claims that his experience as an erstwhile market-socialist reformer convinced him that “a simple conclusion can be drawn: there is no real decentralization without private ownership” (1995, 14, *emph. original*).

This is true, according to Kornai, not because of any wrinkle in economic theory, but because of practical political realities and pressures, such as those felt by government officials in the face of worker-owned firms’ unique problems (e.g., the self-extinguishing tendency). Managers, too, operate differently than those in a privately owned context: “A General Motors manager has an exit: he or she can quit There is no real exit for a company manager under market socialism, since ultimately there is just one employer, the state” (Kornai

1995, 14). Most importantly, though, are the political pressures on government officials, who, under market-socialist reforms, had in principle agreed to let market signals guide firms' behavior. In fact, though, Kornai writes, "profitability fail[ed] to become a matter of life and death or a central target of the firm because the budget constraint [was] still fairly soft" (Kornai 1992, 489).²³ The market's signals can only become hard constraints "if the firm is really separate from the bureaucracy, that is, if it is self-evidently left to itself in times of trouble. The only way of ensuring this separation automatically and spontaneously is by private ownership" (ibid., 494-95).

While these experiences suggest some of the serious problems confronting the worker self-management ideal as a guide to real-world reforms, the most significant problem, I believe, is the one highlighted by the trajectory of Dahl's own career. The fact is that citizens in both East and West have increasingly asserted the values of higher standards of living, material consumption, and defense, and have seemed to signal their willingness to forgo the perfection of democratic ideals in exchange for these things. This fact must give pause to any honestly self-reflective democratic theorist whose support for an ever-deepened democracy is founded on an antipaternalist support for popular self-determination, wherever the people may want to go.

The fate of Dahl's radicalism thus might inspire democratic theorists to focus less on spinning out arguments for the superiority of democratic self-rule, and to turn more attention to the emotions, passions, and desires that motivate actual citizens.

Since the 1980s, many democratic theorists—particularly on the Left—have already begun to focus on the passionate wellsprings of political value-formation by shifting their emphasis onto issues of nationalism, identity politics, and the politics of new social movements. The more pervasive desires at the root of consumerism and modern liberty, in contrast, have not been so carefully

examined. At best, the tendency has been merely to note the antagonism between these desires, on the one hand, and the values of genuine democratic theory, on the other; or to dismiss such desires as unambiguously negative. The fate of Dahl's radical aspirations may stand as a testament to democratic as to need for a more nuanced approach.

NOTES

1. See Ware 1998 for a review of *Toward Democracy* that focuses on what the collection reveals about Dahl's place in the discipline of political science. It is worth noting here, however, that Dahl can best be taken as an immanent critic of his academic discipline (as well as of his society). The clearest illustration of this comes in his 1961 essay, "The Behavioral Approach to Political Science: Epitaph for a Monument to a Successful Protest"—reprinted in the final section of *Toward Democracy*—where he critically appraises the "behavioral revolution" (of which he was an important part) from the standpoint of its own empirical-scientific orientation.
2. Michael Howard (2000, xi), pondering the appropriateness of various labels applied to the political left today, deems radical a "sort of weasel word, because one can be radical in any direction, and it leaves open the question of what one stands for when one has grasped things by the root." I apply the term to Dahl despite such problems. The more common association of radicalism with the Left is not misleading in this case, and the fact that the designation leaves much open to question is a virtue in Dahl's case. The important thing is that Dahl's theory contains a call for far-reaching leftward reform.
3. *Toward Democracy* (hereafter referred to as TD) reprints 57 essays by Dahl in ten topically organized sections. Each section—with the exception of the last one, "Political Science Scope and Method"—is prefaced by brief introductory remarks newly written by the author.
4. Although I believe Dahl will best be remembered as having offered a distinctly American social-democratic voice, that is not to ignore that many of his most important sources of

inspiration are, of course, outside the Anglo-American mainstream. In this way, Dahl can be compared with someone like Thorstein Veblen, whose indigenous radicalism drew from his Northern European heritage. Dahl himself was a third-generation Norwegian (on his father's side), and has collaborated extensively with many Northern European political scientists. "Earlier than most others in American political science," Dahl has said of himself, he "became interested in the smaller European democracies" (TD, 3). Not coincidentally, an original contribution of his *On Democracy* (1998, ch. 2) is the sympathetic inclusion of Viking assemblies, along with more typical mentions of ancient Greece, Rome, and the Renaissance Italian city-state, in its history of democratic institutional innovations.

5. On the three transformations, see also "A Democratic Dilemma: System Effectiveness versus Citizen Participation" (TD, 429-43).
6. The final chapter of his later *Democracy and Its Critics* (1989) includes an argument for workplace democracy, but this is essentially an abbreviated restatement of the argument presented in *A Preface to Economic Democracy*. In what may amount to a telling abandonment of his workplace democracy ideal—or perhaps merely an implicit re-acknowledgment of its utopianism—Dahl does not even bother to present such an argument in *On Democracy* (1998), instead flatly noting that "market-capitalism is unlikely to be displaced in democratic countries" by either central state socialism or workplace democracy, so that "the tension between democratic goals" and the economies in those countries "will almost certainly continue indefinitely" (1998, 182).
7. Dahl was certainly not alone in making this move. David Ciepley (2000, 167-71) discusses the development of this type of analytical distinction by a broad range of American social scientists after the 1930s.
8. Dahl uses the neologism polyarchy to denote a nation-state that approaches the democratic ideal, but which must remain at a distance from it due to the inherent limitations presented by its size.
9. "Not only a specific form of government or party rule makes for totalitarianism," according to Marcuse (1964, 3), "but also a specific system of production and distribution which may well be compatible with a 'pluralism' of parties, newspapers, 'countervailing powers', etc." Against this, Dahl (1971, 17) writes:

I have the impression that this view is most often espoused by intellectuals who are, at heart, liberal or radical democrats disappointed by the transparent failures of polyarchies or near-polyarchies; and that, conversely, intellectuals who have actually experienced life under severely hegemonic regimes rarely argue that differences in regime are trivial.

10. Dahl defends *Who Governs?* in each of TD's first two selections: an autobiographical sketch and a 1991 interview with Nelson Polsby. He concedes that if he "were writing the book today . . . it would be a very different book"—less optimistic and more attentive to the "limits" set by national political-economic structures on local policy making (TD, 12). Dahl, however, also calls *Who Governs?* "extremely well-written" and an advance beyond "simpleminded power theories" of the day. More significantly, he makes no apologies for the observationalist epistemology that has drawn so much criticism (e.g., Bachrach and Baratz 1962; Skinner 1973; Lukes 1974).
11. Or as Skinner (1973, 299) puts it: "To describe a political system as democratic is to perform a speech act within the range of endorsing, commending, or approving of it."
12. It is not my purpose here to determine the validity of this characterization of Dahl's theory on every point. However, it is worth noting that this crucial step in Skinner's argument seems mistaken. One might ask of Skinner why he believes that a commitment to definitions of democracy that are empirically operationalizable requires that a theorist look to his own national-level political association for material out of which to generate such a definition. There are empirically identifiable practices in many other types of association and in many other places from which conceptions of democracy might be abstracted. My point here is that—contra Skinner—Dahl's immanent orientation need not be driven by his positivism.
13. Contrast this with the view of the many Marxists, who would agree with Michael Harrington's portrayal of a Marx who "regarded democracy as the essence of socialism" and who, along with Engels, was "distinguished from all the other radical theorists of their time precisely by their insistence upon the democratic character of socialism" (1972, 37). Bernard Crick (1962, ch. 2) offers a compelling critique of Marx in sympathy with Dahl's position. Marxologists have—in subsequent decades—conceded many of the points

made by Dahl and Crick, while also defending Marx on this count by emphasizing his early works.

14. These three early essays were previously republished, with seven others, as *Democracy, Liberty, and Equality* (1986). At that time their significance in demonstrating the longevity of Dahl's commitments was not lost on Jeffrey Isaac, who in a subsequent Dahl Festschrift noted that both "mainstream political scientists and their radical critics" had "pervasively misunderstood" Dahl's work, overlooking the "critical and socialist leanings" that had been among "the guiding threads of his entire corpus" (1988, 132). Isaac argues against the idea of there having been "two Dahls' sequentially present during his career" (Shapiro and Reeher 1988, 2), but still perceives two simultaneous (rather than successive) Dahls. Thus, he points to an "unresolved dilemma" in Dahl's democratic theory, a tension between liberal and socialist ideals (Isaac 1988, 132-33). Isaac, too, is ultimately reluctant to call Dahl's thought radical, applying the label only once in a carefully qualified manner (*ibid.*, 142). Isaac's judgment is that the radicalism of Dahl's thought must remain "crucially underdetermined" as long as he values socialism only instrumentally (for its contribution to democracy) without taking up "an equally serious commitment to socialism" for its own sake (1988, 144).
15. Avigail Eisenberg (1995) emphasizes the functionalist aspects (and, in my view, overemphasizes this functionalist "period") of Dahl's work in her analysis. Her overall perception of Dahl is as a conservative, although she also hews to the two-Dahls thesis (*ibid.*, 164-65).
16. Revealingly, such rhetoric is worrisome for Dahl not because it heralds radical change, but "because I fear it means we are in for a period of putting rococo decorations on existing structures" (1970, 3).
17. Dahl (TD, 398-400) also tentatively considers the possibilities of workplace democracy in his A.P.S.A. address. He notes the significance of the Yugoslavian model of worker management, predicting that if worker management in the Tito regime proves "to be relatively efficient, surely the whole question of internal democracy will come alive in other countries" (*ibid.*, 400).
18. More succinctly, Dahl calls the liberal axiom at the foundation of his democratic theory "the principle of the equality of interest-bearing individuals" (Dahl et al. 1989, 159).
19. The enthusiasm of the times is reflected in the subtitle of Martin Carnoy and Derek Shearer's 1980 study, which

proclaimed worker democracy to be The Challenge of the 1980s. Other hopeful book-length studies of this period include Pateman 1970, Vanek 1970, Bellas 1972, Oakeshott 1978, Jones and Svenjnar 1982, Thomas and Logan 1982, Estrin 1983, Ellerman 1985, and Sik 1985.

20. His introduction to the second volume of TD essentially repeats this analysis, only with added pessimism: "Whatever and whoever has brought about revolutionary changes that have marked this passing century, it has not been the working class. Nor, I think, is it likely to be so in the century ahead. . . . I confess I see no likely group or coalition that will possess the influence and the desire to bring about the structural changes" necessary for economic democracy (TD, 550-51).
21. Philip Green (1985) notably does so while adopting Dahl's concept of "pseudo-democracy." But while Dahl (TD, ch. 38) uses that term to condemn certain plebiscitary aspects of the American presidency, Green expands it into a general indictment of the American polyarchy.
22. Dahl briefly raises the issue of differential motivation and differences in knowledge, information, and understanding (see TD, chs. 16 and 40, for example), but does not consider the degree to which this might be an unavoidable adjunct of modern social and economic development, nor does he pursue its implications for his call to move beyond polyarchy.
23. Kornai (1995) cites as an example bankruptcy laws, which were enacted everywhere that market-socialist reforms were tried in the Eastern bloc, but were "almost never applied" (ibid., 490). Market-socialist governments felt similarly strong pressures to soften market signals though subsidization, tax policy, and credit provision. One might add that governments operating in private-property regimes also feel such pressure (e.g., calls for corporate bailouts). Kornai's point is that the absence of private-ownership norms and expectations makes it that much harder for governments resist these pressures.

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