POLITICAL THEORY, POLITICAL SCIENCE, AND
THE PREFACE: A REVIEW OF
ROBERT A. DAHL: A Preface to Democratic Theory

Twenty-one years ago Robert Dahl’s *A Preface to Democratic Theory* was greeted by academia in the following words of praise: "skillful," "admirable," "hard-headed," "sophisticated," "unique," "unusually intelligent," "compelling," "excellent," "careful," "systematic," and "subtle."¹ These accolades must have suggested to review readers that the Preface was a very fine book, but they could as well have applied to any other good book. Other descriptive phrases were more revealing of the peculiar contribution of the Preface. Thus readers were informed that the Preface was "fresh," "an important step forward," which offered "the promise of fruitful further researches," and which "pointed political theory to a possible new stage in its development."² These encomiums suggest that Dahl’s Preface was received as a groundbreaking work, one which might influence the direction of political theory, and its offspring political science, for years to come. This was weighty praise, but in singing it, Dahl’s reviewers were merely assenting to claims made by Dahl himself in the book. In introducing his topic, Dahl contended that after "many centuries of political speculation" political theory was still "rather unsatisfactory" whether "essentially ethical" or "essentially an attempt to describe the actual world" (p. 1).³ Indeed, the many centuries of effort had failed to provide a consistent set of standards for political theory, since "there is no democratic theory—there are only democratic theories" (p. 1). But, Dahl believed, such a set of standards is possible, and he set it as his task in the Preface to determine at least some of them. "I have called these essays *A Preface to Democratic


² Ibid.

Theory," he said, "because for the most part they raise questions that would need to be answered by a satisfactory theory of democratic politics" (p. 1). In other words, it was Dahl's intention to establish the only satisfactory grounds upon which political theory could advance.

The Preface has now reached the age of maturity, and although it has not had the centuries of ripening enjoyed by the theories it criticizes, it is perhaps not unfair for us to pause and take stock of its message once again. For, if we may borrow wisdom from the America of James Madison, it is always useful to recur to fundamentals, and surely the Preface and its author are fundamental to the contemporary era of American political science. In this essay, I am primarily concerned to consider the claim of the Preface to be placed among the classic writings in political theory. Therefore, I devote my attention for the most part to an analysis of its arguments. I assume that they must stand on their own, if the book is to be placed upon the shelf along with Aristotle, Locke, Madison, et al. An important aspect of a classic writing, however, is its impact upon its own times. Therefore, in the last section of the essay I consider the significance of the Preface in terms of its contribution to a generation of political inquiry. The evolution of Professor Dahl's own theoretical perspective seems to me to be of less importance in terms of the purposes of this essay. I have, from time to time, indicated in footnotes references to his later writings in regard to theoretical issues. I find little in his later writings to suggest any fundamental change in his perspective. In any event, this essay will focus upon an argument and its impact upon a field of inquiry; it will not examine the evolution of the thought of a person.

Dahl proceeds by considering "representative" democratic theories. The first such theory which he examines he calls "Madison-Ian democracy." The term is carefully selected to distinguish a type of theory from the thought of a particular man. Madisonian democracy is a theory which tries to reconcile majority rule and minority rights through the devices of constitutional democracy. Madison is portrayed as the most noteworthy exponent of this type of theory, thus legitimizing the ascription of his name to a theory which he may or may not have espoused. In spite of his ap-
parent concern (pp. 4-5, 24), Dahl never adequately establishes whether he is talking about a type of theory or the thought of James Madison. He speaks of "Madison's case," "Madison the theorist," and also of "Madisonian theory," all on the same page (p. 5). This ambivalence pervades the chapter. One might have expected, if it were an argument which concerned Dahl, that he would have attempted to construct it in simple logical terms, which could have then been subjected to analysis. In fact, this is the approach he adopts in his critique of populist democracy in chapter 2. Similarly, if his intention was to criticize the views of James Madison, one might have expected him to have undertaken a careful exegesis of Madison's writings. Instead, Dahl does neither. He bases his critique of Madison/Madisonian theory on an exegesis of the Federalist, a book written by James Madison and two other men. On the basis of this exegesis, Dahl attempts to reconstruct the logic of Madisonian theory in syllogistic form. This procedure enables Dahl to criticize the text of the Federalist where, on his reading, it appears inadequate, and to criticize the logic of the reconstructed argument where it appears inadequate.

Such a procedure is bound to be arbitrary, and indeed, Dahl's reading of the Federalist reflects a number of misunderstandings. The exegesis departs from a premise not warranted on the basis of the text and therefore becomes immediately immersed in a logical reconstruction of the argument of the Federalist which is correspondingly unwarranted. The incorrect premise is justified on the basis of evidence gathered from scattered and selectively chosen quotations taken from the debates in the Federal Convention and in the state ratifying conventions, and the reconstruction of the argument which ensues is justified by the contention that it strengthens the view. In both cases Dahl violates basic principles of textual analysis. First he fails to immerse himself in the evidence in order to seek its inner logic. Instead he draws selectively on the evidence in order to support his preconceived thesis. Second, the evidence upon which he selectively draws is not established as relevant to the question at hand; things said by other persons in the conventions may or may not be relevant to understanding the views of Madison or the argument of the Federalist. Third, Dahl reads into the argument concepts which are foreign to it, without any supporting evidence at all. This misrepresentation would be more forgivable if Dahl had merely misconstrued the meaning of a
term. It is unforgivable because he goes beyond this to supply a
new term to the argument which it not only does not require, but
is fatal to it. Far from strengthening the argument of the Federalist,
Dahl alters it in a way which makes it unsupportable. In order to
clarify these general points, let us descend to some specifics.

Dahl contends that the basic psychological premise of Madison-
ian democracy is as follows:

If unrestrained by external checks, any given individual or group
of individuals will tyrannize over others (p. 6). (emphasis added)

This hypothesis plays a special role in Dahl's argument, to be sure.
By stating it in extreme Hobbesian terms, he leaves it open to the
possibility of counter example. One wonders, however, if it can
possibly be true, or if Madison could possibly have subscribed to it.
Did Madison suppose that an unrestrained Jefferson, or an unre-
strained Washington, would become a tyrant? Or even an unre-
strained Madison? Dahl supports this interpretive premise (p. 8)
by citing four quotations from "remarks at the state and federal
conventions," but the quotations do not relate to the premise. All
of them state in one way or another that men will seek power, and
that the more power they have, the more they will want. Now seek-
ing power may well be causally related to an absence of external
checks and/or to the desire to tyrannize, but if so, this is not estab-
lished by the cited passages, or by any argument offered by Dahl.

The text of the Federalist reveals evidence contrary to Dahl's
premise. While it is true that Hamilton characterizes men as "am-
bitious, vindictive and rapacious" in number six, and Madison
admits that men are not angels, in number fifty-one, it is clear
that neither of the two principal authors regard human nature in
quite the cynical light that Dahl's first premise suggests. Hamilton,
after all, believed that it was the American people who were "to
decide the important question, whether societies of men are really
capable or not of establishing good government from reflection and
choice" (number one), and he states it as his view that "the sup-
position of universal venality in human nature is little less in error
in political reasoning than the supposition of universal rectitude"
(number seventy-six). Madison, while respectful of the dangers of

quotations from the Federalist will be cited in the text either directly or
parenthetically according to the number of the essay from which the quotation
was taken.
the darker aspects of human nature, believed that while "there is a degree of depravity in mankind which requires a certain degree of circumspection and distrust, so there are other qualities in human nature which justify a certain portion of esteem and confidence" (number fifty-five). And it is clear that Madison believed that the American people were well suited by nature for the tasks of self-government, since "republican government presupposes the existence of these qualities in a higher degree than any other form" (number fifty-five), and since "It is evident that no other form would be reconcilable with the genius of the people of America; with the fundamental principles of the Revolution; or with that honorable determination which animates every votary of freedom to rest all our political experiments on the capacity of mankind for self-government" (number thirty-nine).

Neither common sense nor the evidence of the text justify Dahl's first premise. Of course, Dahl could have stated the premise in a more moderate form, as he suggests on page nineteen. Some men, perhaps, will tyrannize over others unless restrained by external checks. However, to state the premise in this form suggests a number of questions, such as, who and under what circumstances? To have stated the premise conditionally would have been justified off of the text of the Federalist, but it would not have served Dahl's purpose, for it would have prevented him from employing it in an over-simplified syllogism. Unfortunately, the Hobbesian premise leads Dahl away from a principal teaching of the Federalist. That teaching is precisely that some men are much less apt to abuse political power than others, and ought therefore to have a monopoly on its use. As Madison put it in number fifty-seven: "The aim of every political constitution is, or ought to be, first to obtain for rulers men who possess most wisdom and discern, and most virtue to pursue, the common, good of the society; and in the next place, to take the most effectual precautions for keeping them virtuous whilst they continue to hold their public trust." What precautions should be taken? To anticipate our subsequent analysis of Dahl we must notice Madison's next sentence: "The elective mode of obtaining rulers is the characteristic policy of republican government."

Dahl's first premise is flawed in another and equally as serious a way, however. He employs the verb "tyrannize" instead of the noun

5 This is the first instance in the book where Dahl claims one of Madison's arguments as his own.
"tyranny" as used by Madison. For Madison, tyranny was a condition or state of affairs. It referred to a particular type of regime, or a particular form of political organization. Specifically, it denoted a regime in which the three basic aspects of political power—legislative, executive, and judicial—were collected in the same hands. Madison defined tyranny in these procedural terms in the *Federalist* number forty-seven, and he quotes Jefferson to the same effect in number forty-eight. Yet Dahl, unperturbed, sees fit to replace Madison's definition with a definition of tyranny as "every severe deprivation of a natural right" (p. 6). Why does Dahl do this? His error derives from a correct observation and an incorrect analysis of the implications of that observation. Why, Dahl wonders, would tyranny, as Madison defines it, be an undesirable state of affairs? Presumably, he reasons, because those in power would use that power to the disadvantage of other people, or, in the vernacular of the times, deprive them of their natural rights. It is because the collection of all power in the same hands leads to the deprivation of natural rights that it is undesirable. And we may define such deprivations as the essence of "tyranny."

Two difficulties are involved here. First, Dahl declines the opportunity to search for Madison's answer to the key question, why is tyranny as he (Madison) has defined it a bad thing? Second, even if some other definition of tyranny proves to be necessary upon examination, it does not follow that such a definition requires the concept of natural rights. These two points are related. If Dahl had searched for Madison's answer to the question, he would have discovered that Madison nowhere in the *Federalist* makes any reference to natural rights. Therefore, even if some answer to the key question must necessarily be inferred, there is no reason to employ the notion of natural rights if some other more plausible reconstruction is possible and more consistent with the evidence of the text. This problem is particularly acute since Dahl’s principal criticism of the reconstructed argument is that the concept of natural rights has no meaning unless specific natural rights can be itemized (p. 23). The fact of the matter is that, in spite of his contention to the contrary, Dahl’s reconstruction of the argument of the *Federalist* is neither consistent with its text, nor more defensible than that text. Dahl has, in other words, constructed a straw man in spite of his denial of having done so (p. 24). Let us trace through the consequences of these analytical flaws.

Having defined tyranny in terms of the deprivation of natural
rights, and having ascribed to Madison the premise that the constitutional separation of powers is necessary in order to prevent tyranny thus defined, Dahl confronts his Madison with the observation that there are a number of democracies which do not have the separation of powers but which also do not deprive their citizens of natural rights. Therefore, reasons Dahl, a further premise is necessary in order to retrieve Madison’s position, hypothesis 6:

Frequent popular elections will not provide an external check sufficient to prevent tyranny (p.13).

Now it must be noted that the tyranny to which Dahl refers in this hypothesis is his own, rather than Madison’s. That is, frequent popular elections will not prevent severe deprivations of natural rights. It is interesting to note that, unless the concept of natural rights has empirical validity, it makes no sense to say that democracies without the separation of powers actually prevent their abuse. Beyond this point; Dahl’s attempt to refute Madison’s defense of the hypothesis is deficient. He locates Madison’s treatment of this issue in the Federalist number forty-nine, where, according to Dahl, Madison "attempts to prove that the check provided by electoral processes is inadequate to prevent all powers, legislative, executive, and judiciary, from accumulating in the same hands" (pp. 13-14). Now one might wonder whether or not an argument adduced by Madison to defend the hypothesis in terms of his notion of tyranny can be at all relevant to a defense of the hypothesis on Dahl’s definition of tyranny, as Dahl supposes. Unfortunately, this is only the beginning of his difficulties in dealing with the forty-ninth Federalist.

Dahl tells his readers what Madison, in number forty-nine, fears “frequent appeals” (Dahl’s term) because of the dangers of stirring popular passions, the dangers of casting doubt upon the government, and the advantages which the legislative branch of government would enjoy in any popular contest. "Frequent popular elections" is substituted by Dahl for "frequent appeals" in the explicit statement of hypothesis six, causing the reader to wonder first, if Madison actually referred to either term, and second, if the two terms are intended to denote the same type of activity. If the wondering reader were to turn to the pages of the forty-ninth Federalist his curiosity would turn to surprise. For there we find Madison not talking about the elections of public officials at all, but instead discussing the desirability of having regular constitutional conventions
for the purposes of amending and correcting breaches of the Constitution. By breaches of the Constitution, Madison means violations of the principle of separation of powers, not the deprivation of natural rights. By "appeals to the people" (Madison's term) he does not mean elections, as Dahl supposes. Rather, he is discussing the feasibility of popular regulation of the basic constitutional structure through periodic conventions.

Here again, Dahl, because of his misinterpretation of the text, has missed a fundamental tenet of its teaching. For what does Madison tell us about the efficacy of popular elections? Having rejected the possibility of having periodic constitutional conventions in order to maintain the separation of powers, he comes in number fifty-one of the *Federalist* to propose his solution to the problem of maintaining each of the branches within their proper spheres.

In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself. A dependence on the people is, no doubt, the primary control on the government; but experience has taught mankind the necessity of auxiliary precautions. (emphasis added)

Dahl's contention that Madison had little faith in elections is plainly false. Yet Madison does acknowledge the need for "auxiliary precautions." For what are these precautions necessary? They are necessary in order to maintain the separation of powers. Why are they necessary in order to maintain the separation of powers? Why will not elections suffice? Madison did not prove that "auxiliary precautions" are necessary, relying solely upon the authority of experience. But we may say that Dahl's arguments certainly have not proven them unnecessary either. Why should the separation of powers be maintained? Here, we once again return to Dahl's initial misinterpretation of the *Federalist*, for the assumption which underlies his analysis of hypothesis six is the same as that which underlay his analysis of hypothesis one, to wit, that the separation of powers is merely a means to the end of securing natural rights. But this interpretation clearly supposes that the preservation of natural rights is the principal function of government, if, not its only function. Otherwise one would not be able to deduce that anything necessary for government is ultimately a means to that end. But the preservation of natural rights is certainly not the only, and quite likely not even the most important function of
government on the teaching of the *Federalist*, and *this is* the core of its teaching which Dahl completely overlooks.

I wish to return to this point momentarily, but first, it is important to deal with Dahl's treatment of another major aspect of the argument of the *Federalist*, the problem of the overbearing majority. Madison recognized that in a popular government, a majority of the citizens could impose its will on a minority, contrary to the rights of that minority or to the interest of the whole. In the tenth *Federalist* he argues that this will be unlikely to occur in an extended republic, because either the heterogeneity of the society will make the existence of such a majority impossible, or else it will make it impossible for such a majority to act should it happen to exist. Now this argument, stated concisely in number ten, is widely regarded as America's most unique contribution to political theory. Nevertheless, it is subject to some obvious objections. One, it presupposes that the society will not be divided into obvious and permanent minorities and majorities, as in the case of whites and blacks, or that of north and south. Second, it presupposes a society which is basically agrarian and rural, one without the advantages of modern transportation and communications systems. Third, it presupposes the absence of the sort of centralized political system which might make possible the unification of national majorities on a regular basis. Fourth, it presupposes the presence of a diverse culture which might not always exist, even in the largest of countries.

In view of the fact that these and other empirical criticisms of the theory of the extended sphere are available to Dahl, the objections which he does level against Madison seem relatively trivial. Simply put, they are two: one, majority tyranny has no meaning, because tyranny has no meaning, because natural rights have no meaning; two, that majority faction has no meaning because Madison defined a faction in terms of such ambiguous concepts as the "rights of other citizens" and the "permanent and aggregate interests of the community." The former objection is incorrect because Dahl assumes that by "rights of other citizens" Madison must necessarily mean natural rights, which is not so, as we shall see. The latter objection is valid, however. As Madison has defined "faction" it is necessary to determine precisely what the rights of other citizens and the permanent and aggregate interests of the community are in order to operationalize the definition. However, we must not be led astray by this point. It is important to remember Madison's
purpose in discussing the problem of factions. That purpose was to analyze how the violence of fractions could be controlled. His remedy for this problem takes the form of the theory of the extended sphere. His prediction was that, since the United States would be a large country containing a heterogeneous population, factions would be unlikely to arise. If they did arise, then he predicted that they would find it difficult to discover their strength and conspire to act. Now the salient fact is that this remedy for the problem of the violence of factions will work, whether the faction is a "bad" faction (i.e., one which satisfies Madison's definition), or a "good" faction (i.e., one which instead seeks to achieve the public good). Madison's theory, in other words, works, in spite of the restrictive way in which he defined "faction." Now it is possible that Madison actually believed that the size of the country would operate against schemes which were bad for the country, and not against schemes which were good for the country. "In the extended republic of the United States," he tells us in number fifty-one, a coalition of a majority of the whole society could seldom take place on any other principles than those of justice and the general good" (emphasis added). But whether or not Madison was correct in believing this to be so, Dahl's objections to his theory are not significant, because they do not touch upon that theory's major empirical contentions.

Dahl's objections to the argument of the tenth Federalist are, then, essentially trivial. However, Dahl proceeds to add insult to his injury by claiming its central premise as his own. For Dahl tells us that, the "Madisonian argument . . underestimates the importance of the inherent social checks and balances existing in every pluralist society" (p. 22), and it is, of course, the emphasis on social checks and balances which is the distinguishing characteristic of the pluralist view with which Dahl's name is so prominently associated. As a reading of the Federalist, this is amazing. Any plain reading of the tenth Federalist reveals that Madison thought that the only solution to the problem of an overbearing majority was the existence of a heterogeneous social structure. He says so most explicitly in number fifty-one:

In a free government the security for civil rights must be the same as that for religious rights. It consists in the one case in the multiplicity of interests, and in the other in the multiplicity of sects. The degree of security in both cases will depend upon the number of interests and sects; and this may be presumed to depend
on the extent of the country and number of people comprehended under the same government. [emphasis added]

Could anything be clearer?

Shorn of its syllogistic trappings, Dahl's critique of Madisonian democracy reduces to two related points: one, the theory is incoherent because its key terms are not adequately defined; two, it is empirically ungrounded, in that it is based upon false premises, and in that it cannot be proven to achieve its stated objectives. Now strictly, Dahl proves neither of these points. His objections to Madison's definitions are irrelevant because they are either addressed to terms foreign to Madison's discussion (as in the case of natural rights), or because they are addressed to the terms themselves, rather than to the role which those terms play in the argument (as in the case of factions). His empirical criticisms of Madison are either wrong (as in the case of social checks and balances), or else inconclusive (as in the case of external and internal restraints). Thus, Dahl does not make his case.

But, a more fundamental issue is at stake: the correct interpretation of the Federalist. While eschewing a comprehensive textual analysis of it, let me hazard the following brief observations on this topic. The primary objective of Publius was to erect a republican government in America, one "in which the scheme of representation takes place" (number ten). This objective occasions two questions: one, why is a republic desirable?; two, how can a republic be achieved? In regard to the second question, Madison is quite specific. In number thirty-nine he defines a republic as "a government which derives all its powers directly or indirectly from the great body of the people, and is administered by persons holding their offices during pleasure for a limited period or during good behavior." How can such a government be attained? He continues:

it is essential to such a government that it be derived from the great body of the society, not from an inconsiderable proportion or a favored class of it; . . . It is sufficient for such a government that the persons administering it be appointed, either directly or indirectly, by the people; and that they hold their appointments by either of the tenures just specified.

The necessary characteristic of a republican government, then, is that it be a government which represents the whole people, and the sufficient condition of this is that it be a government based on the electoral principle. Here, we must note that Dahl misreads number
thirty-nine (pp. 10-11). He holds that, for Madison, a republic was a necessary but not a sufficient condition of non-tyranny (=non-deprivation of natural rights). Of course a republic is obviously not a necessary condition of this sort of non-tyranny, as benign despotism would illustrate, and it is not sufficient condition of this sort of non-tyranny either, witness the problem of majority tyranny. But as Madison defined tyranny, a republic is both a necessary and a sufficient condition of non-tyranny, which is what he actually said.

Thus, elections are the key to the attainment of republican government. This is not merely a definitional matter. Of course elections are a part of the very meaning of republican government. But as a matter of fact, elections are the surest way of maintaining republican government, or if you wish, of maintaining themselves. Therefore, Madison is tenacious in his defense of the electoral principle. He says in number fifty-one that "a dependence on the people is, no doubt, the primary control on government." He says in number fifty-two that "The definition of the right of suffrage is very justly regarded as a fundamental article of republican government." In number fifty-three he speaks of "free governments, of which frequency of elections is the cornerstone." He says in number fifty-seven that "the elective mode of obtaining rulers is the characteristic policy of republican government." This faith in elections rests upon both logical and empirical grounds. Madison recognizes that elections are logically necessary on the principle of political equality, and he also recognizes that as a matter of fact, they are the best means of insuring that the ends of republican government will be achieved.

But what are those ends? Here is where Dahl’s style of analysis cuts in. Why is republican government desirable? Why is government desirable generally? Dahl infers that the primary function of government, on the Madisonian view, is the protection of natural rights. Republican government is the best government because it will most effectively accomplish this end. It is possible that Dahl is guided here by the second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence. This may (or may not), be the teaching of the Declaration, but it is clearly not the teaching of the Federalist. Madison posits two general goals for government. The first is to achieve the public good, and the second is to protect the rights of individuals and minorities. These two goals are related, but not
co-extensive. Madison recognizes that "the rights of other citizens" are not identical with "the permanent and aggregate interests of the community" (number ten). The latter category is more extensive, and includes all of the things which government must do for people, such as regulating commerce, establishing a uniform currency, erecting a postal system, and any other task which might be "necessary and proper" under the Constitution. In short, the government has an affirmative responsibility to "promote the general Welfare" and the fulfilling of this responsibility may well involve it in all sorts of policy determinations.

Now Madison was no welfare state liberal, to be sure, and the scope of things that the government needed to do, in his view, may have been quite small when measured by the standards of today. But he did believe that the government should have the power to accomplish its prescribed ends. Thus, in the Convention, he expressed grave doubts about the practicability of limiting the authority of the federal government." In other words he believed in Hamilton's great aphorisms that "the means ought to be proportioned to the end" (number twenty-three) and that "a government ought to contain in itself every power requisite to the full accomplishment of the objects committed to its care, and to the complete executive of the trusts for which it is responsible, free from every other control but a regard to the public good and to the sense of the people" (number thirty-one). And Madison was in full agreement with Hamilton's belief that "all observations founded upon the danger of usurpation ought to be referred to the composition and structure of the government, not to the nature or extent of its powers" (number thirty-one). In Madison's own words, it is necessary "that in all cases where power is to be conferred, the point first to be decided is whether such a power is necessary to the public good; as the next will be, in case of an affirmative decision, to guard as effectually as possible against a perversion of the power to the public detriment" (number forty-one).

Thus, Madison believed that the advantage of republican government lay both in its tendency to promote good policies as well as in its tendency to protect private rights, and that the electoral principle was the principal security for both. Now several questions arise out of this. If the government is both to secure the public

good and protect individual rights, then which is of higher priority in cases where the two goals conflict? What does Publius mean by usurpation of power? Can the power of government be limited at all? Are there some things which no government can rightly do? Will elections really serve to insure that the goals of government will be achieved? The _Federalist_ provides answers to these perplexing questions. I will conclude this discussion by addressing myself to the one question which is central to Dahl’s argument. What does Madison mean by ”the rights of other citizens,” ”private rights,” ”civil rights,” and ”the rights of the minor party”? Dahl assumes that some concept of natural rights underlies these various phrases, but this is clearly not necessary. If rights are specified in a constitution, then they are subject to abuse by government even though they are not derived from nature. If the powers of government are enumerated in a constitution, then the government violates someone’s rights whenever it exercises a power which it is not given. If the government is denied certain powers in a constitution, then it violates someone’s rights whenever it exercises such a power. Therefore the government may abridge the rights of citizens if it issues paper money, abolishes debts, or divides property equally (all cited in number ten), but these are not necessarily rights derived from nature.

Dahl is correct in assuming that the separation of powers is, for Madison, merely a means to a larger end, but he misinterprets that end. The separation of powers is an ”auxiliary precaution” which was needed in order to make the abuse of power more difficult. It is the way in which the Founders guarded against ”the danger of usurpation” through ”the composition and structure of the government.” But the ”usurpations” which the Founders feared related to both unwise policy decisions and to abuses of constitutional rights. Therefore Dahl’s objections to their theory are invalid.

So much, then, for Dahl’s critique of Madisonian democracy. We have seen that Dahl’s case against it does not stand up on its own grounds, due partly to Dahl’s misreading of the _Federalist_. But we must not forget that his broader purpose was to establish the fact that our traditional faith in constitutional democracy is not empirically founded. This fact, of course, could not have been established according to the procedures followed by Dahl, because it requires empirical investigation of the sort which Dahl recom-
mends but does not thoroughly undertake. I shall, in considering Dahl's "American Hybrid," have occasion to discuss a few facts which he attempts to establish in the book. In the next section, however, I address Dahl's analysis of majoritarian democracy.

II

The second theory of democracy which Dahl analyzes he calls "populistic democracy." Essentially, this is a statement of simple majoritarian democracy, or at least, of one of its variants. In the form in which it is presented by Dahl, I know of no theorist who has ever espoused it. Perhaps this is why Dahl chooses to deal with a logical reconstruction of the argument here, rather than to identify the view with a particular theorist, as he did with Madisonian democracy in chapter 1. Whatever the case, it appears that chapters 2 and 3 are really of a piece. Dahl's intention is to critique the simple logical statement of majoritarian democracy in chapter 2 and then to reconstruct it on a sounder basis in chapter 3. The analysis in chapter 2 stands to a great extent on the adequacy of Dahl's statement of populistic democracy. Given the way in which the argument is stated, Dahl's criticisms of it are true, but some of them become less tenable when addressed to a variation of simple majoritarian democracy which Dahl does not consider. I wish to

7 In his address to a plenary session of the American Political Science Association Convention meeting in Chicago in September of 1976 Dahl renewed his attack on the theory of separation of powers and checks and balances. Then, he made it clear that the past twenty years have not occasioned any alteration of his views as expressed in the Preface. In examining his major published books during the past twenty years, I am unable to determine that he has pursued the empirical investigation of this issue much beyond where he left it in the Preface. He reiterates the argument of the Preface in Pluralist Democracy in the United States (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967). In Political Oppositions in Western Democracies (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), he devotes approximately seven pages to the role of constitutional factors in relationship to the development of political oppositions (pp. 59-61, 348-352). In Polyarchy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971) Dahl discusses all of the conditions favorable to the development of polyarchies, but none of these conditions relates to constitutional arrangements (see especially p. 203). I would qualify this, however, by saying that Dahl does ascribe importance to constitutional rules which regulate electoral arrangements.

8 Dahl quotes from several theorists in introducing populistic democracy, including Aristotle, Locke, Jefferson, and Rousseau. Leaving aside the heavy-handed way in which this procedure ignores the important differences in the perspectives of these theorists, it is interesting to note that a case can be made that all of the passages which Dahl cites on pp. 34-35 rest upon what in this essay I call the free-will model of democracy, and not upon Dahl's preference model.
argue here that Dahl states the argument of majoritarian democracy incorrectly, and to analyze some of the implications of this definitional error. His statement of the argument is wrong on two related counts: first, he bases it upon the concept of preference, rather than upon the concept of choice; second, he fails to define democracy in procedural terms.

Dahl presents his model of populistic democracy in terms of the preference of each member of an organization. The conditions of popular sovereignty and political equality are offered as axioms, and from these axioms the principle of majority rule is deduced. Popular sovereignty, for Dahl, means that the policies adopted by the organization are those most preferred by its membership, and political equality entails that the preferences of each member must be weighted equally. Therefore the principle of majority rule is defined as follows:

The principle of majority rule prescribes that in choosing among alternatives, the alternative preferred by the greater number is selected. That is, given two or more alternatives, $x, y, \text{etc.}$, in order for $x$ to be government policy it is a necessary and sufficient condition that the number who prefer $x$ to any alternative is greater than the number who prefer any single alternative to $x$ (pp. 37-38).

Against this conception of democracy, Dahl arrays objections under three headings: technical, ethical, and empirical. The laundry list of objections includes the following: populistic democracy cannot deal with the indifferent voter; it cannot deal with ties; it does not specify the membership of the group; it does not determine its own empirical preconditions; it cannot be satisfied by any practical voting method; it is based upon too limited a set of values; it is apt to be unstable; it cannot deal with intensity of preference; it tells us nothing about the real world; etc. Now some of these objections are telling against democracy in any of its variants. But by interpreting democracy in terms of preference Dahl creates unnecessary difficulties, as we shall see.

Few people would agree that a majority should always get its way, if getting its way means having its preferences realized every time. Many people would agree, however, that under suitably de-

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9 Dahl never wavers from the preference standard. See: Regimes and Oppositions (New Haven: Yale, 1973), p. 1; Polyarchy, pp. 1-3; After the Revolution (New Haven: Yale, 1970), pp. 11-12. Although he is firmly committed to the concept of preference, Dahl finds no place for it in the indices of any of his books; and as far as I am aware, he nowhere subjects it to analysis.
fined circumstances the majority should always have its choices accepted as public policy. This difference hinges upon a recognition of the distinction between a preference and a choice. When a pollster asks a respondent if he will vote for candidate A or candidate B, the respondent indicates an intention to vote for candidate A or candidate B which presumably embodies a preference for one or the other. (Dahl is correct in noting that the existence of a preference must always be assumed.) Of course, it is possible that the respondent has no real preference, and is replying arbitrarily, or lying. Now when the same respondent goes into the voting booth to cast his ballot, he is engaging in an activity of quite a different sort. He is *choosing* one candidate or the other. Here, whether or not he in fact has a preference for the candidate he chooses makes no difference, since what is expected of him is an act of *will*, which can be exercised independent of any particular motive such as preference. It is, after all, possible to choose that which we do not prefer. To deny the possibility would make nonsense of such common life experiences as studying, dieting, or abstaining, when in fact we do not wish to do so.

In making a choice by voting I commit myself to accept an outcome. Clearly I am committed if my choice is adopted as policy, or my candidate wins the election. But I am also committed if my choice is the loser. Why? Because the theory of democratic decision-making which underlies this choice situation is predicated upon the assumption that all citizens are to be treated as equal in the sense that each is entitled to a single choice, or a single act of will. The principle of majority rule; on this view, is a logical derivative of the principle of political equality understood as the equal right of all rational human beings in a particular political community, in the maturity of their faculties, to participate in the governing of that community. From this perspective, all are committed to obey the will of the majority because this is the only possible decision-making principle compatible with the freedom of will of all. Thus, this theory of, democracy views the problem of government as that of reconciling the free will of each individual with the need for public authority.

There is a long and respected tradition in political theory which attempts to effect this reconciliation through the normative doctrine of democracy. Rousseau and Kant come immediately to mind in this regard, as more recently does John Rawls. I shall refer to this as the free-will model of democracy, as opposed to
Dahl's preference model. Now this tradition argues *explicitly against* the utilitarian tradition associated with John Stuart Mill which emphasized preference as the fundamental political value. Indeed, the free-will model is arguably more central to democratic theory, since it insists upon the value of political equality, while the utilitarians realized that the concepts of preference and political equality were incompatible in some cases, as may be gleaned from an examination of Mill's *Representative Government*.\(^\text{10}\) Mill believed that some preferences were better than others, and should count for more in the decisions of government. In advancing the free-will model against the utilitarian model the rationalist philosophers were not, to be sure, contending that it could be completely realized in practice. Their purpose was to determine the answer to the normative question of the legitimate basis of political authority. The answer to that question might well serve as an ideal which could influence practice, but as a statement of philosophical truth, this was not a requirement of the theory.

It is not my intention to defend this view of democracy against the many serious objections which have been brought against it. I merely wish to point out that it does not suffer from several difficulties which are inherent in Dahl's preference model. For example, when the democratic ideal is posed in terms of preference satisfaction, it does not appear that a democratic decision-making process is a necessary consequence of the theory. For surely a benign despotism may be equally if not more capable of satisfying the preferences of the majority. But under the free-will model of democracy, the possibility of benign despotism is eliminated.\(^\text{11}\)


\(^{11}\) In *Polyarchy* Dahl attempts to apply the approach which he outlines in chapter 3 of the Preface to contemporary regimes. There, he begins by posing the problem of democratization in terms of the extent to which a political system satisfied the preferences of its citizens. This preference satisfaction is presumed to depend upon the degree to which the political system allows effective opposition to the prevailing regime. The problem which the book addresses, then, is, how can non-polyarchies become polyarchies (and conversely)? This leads Dahl into an analysis of conditions favoring participation. In an appendix, Dahl rank orders contemporary countries in terms of the extent of effective participation. Liberal democracies are high on the list, what some people call "peoples" democracies are at the bottom. Now I do not see why advocates of "peoples" democracies are not free to argue that, in spite of the relative lack of participation, and the absence of effective opposition, "peoples" democracies are still more responsive to the preferences of their members than are liberal democracies, since the people run "peoples" democracies, while the upper classes run liberal de-
Then, too, the preference model suffers from a necessary dilemma, addressed by Dahl in chapter 4. Does most preferred equal preferred by most? In other words, how shall we evaluate intensity of preference? To anticipate our subsequent discussion, it is clear that most chosen equals chosen by most, where choices are one to a customer.

Several of the criticisms which Dahl makes of his model of populistic democracy would be equally as telling against the free-will model. For example, in both cases there is no obvious solution to the problem of ties, setting the agenda for making choices (or expressing preferences) is still crucial, and a minority will probably make most of the key decisions anyway. But even in the face of the credibility of these and other similar objections, Dahl's major objection to populistic democracy becomes more suspect under the free-will model. That overriding objection is that populistic democracy bears little relation to the real world, because it is a purely logical statement. Since it deals only with premises and conclusions, it makes no reference to consequences, and therefore its effects when realized in practice are necessarily indeterminate. And unfortunately, says Dahl, there is all too much reason to believe that those effects would be deleterious.

Dahl's principal contention is that populistic democracy sacrifices all other goals to that of political equality (and its consequent, popular sovereignty). Not only is this intrinsically irrational, since no case can be made for the superiority of political equality as a value, but it is irrational in effect, too, since the dogmatic adherence to political equality may lead to instability. This will occur when minority groups perceive that their preferences are being consistently denied. Dahl disdains the opportunity to pursue the ultimate justification of political equality and popular sovereignty on the grounds that it would demand "some theory about the validation of ethical propositions" which is "beyond my purpose here" (p. 45). It is unfortunate that Dahl did not perceive the necessity of dealing with the problem of justification, for if he had, he might have been led to perceive the inadequacy of his preference

mocracies. Indeed, this is precisely what they do argue, and I do not know that there is any available evidence (e.g. evidence of widespread dissatisfaction with "peoples" regimes) to show them wrong. The evidence is substantial, however, that voters in "peoples" democracies do not exercise free will, in any meaningful sense, in regard to the governance of their countries.
model. And, too, he might have been led to come to grips with the problem of value priority, which underlies his criticism of the dogmatic character of populistic democracy. But in addition, Dahl's failure to pursue the normative question leads him astray in terms of his interpretation of the empirical consequences. He contends that in the absence of severe social indoctrination in the norm of political equality, a heterogeneous social system predicated upon it is apt to be unstable. This is perhaps true, if the norm of political equality is defined in terms of preference. For it is difficult to see why a minority should continue to acquiesce in a system which consistently subordinates its preferences to that of a majority, since preferences are relative matters in the first place. Yet if the democratic ideal is explained in terms of its derivation from the normative value of free will, then it provides its own rationale, and no further instrumental rationale is needed. Thus, if a minority is convinced that the decision-making system is fair, then it may be apt to submit to its outcomes willingly, even if it is a consistent loser. Thus, the concept of democracy based upon freedom of will, since it carries with it its own justification, may indeed be more stable than any alternative model, at least in a society whose members subscribe to the values it presupposes.12

Here we arrive at the second objection to Dahl's exposition of simple democracy, which is parallel to the first. Normatively, the concept of preference differs from that of choice, as we have seen.

12 The question is one of the relationship between the satisfaction of interests and perceptions of fairness in influencing people to go along with the decisions of government. Democratic theory should attempt to explain to citizens the circumstances under which it is right that their interests not be satisfied. Dahl has not deviated from the presumption that political attitudes are something inculcated into people through socialization, rather than something which people adopt because they are able to comprehend issues and values. In Polyarchy, for example, he tells us that if you "scratch the average democrat ... you will not find a Locke, a Rousseau, a Jefferson, or even a Lincoln" (p. 132). Leaving aside the question of Lincoln's status in relationship to Locke, Rousseau, and Jefferson, I would say that, while the average citizen will probably not be able to explain his political attitudes in the same depth as would a philosopher or a statesman, nevertheless, the average citizen understands fully the basic moral sentiment upon which democratic theories are ordinarily predicated. That sentiment is precisely that all members of a society are entitled to be regarded equally in the political system by which that society is governed. What this sentiment might entail in the way of political institutions is something about which the average citizen may be less certain. I suspect that most American citizens have a more sophisticated understanding of the nature of democratic government than Dahl would allow, and that this understanding is just that-understanding, and not social indoctrination.
But they are different in form also. Preferences are substantive; they are tied intimately to policy outcomes, since it is the outcomes which are to be preferred. Choices, however, are procedural; they are a part of a way of selecting outcomes, even outcomes which are not preferred. The free-will model of democracy, which is rooted in the concept of choice, is inherently procedural, since it emphasizes the way in which decisions are made, rather than the decisions themselves. Dahl's preference model is inherently substantive, since it emphasizes the decisions themselves, rather than the way in which those decisions are made. This difference is crucial because it reflects a difference in the perspective on the nature and function of government itself. Dahl sees government through the eyes of a political scientist. From that perspective, government must be viewed in terms of its existential qualities. What does it look like? What does it do? Well, obviously, it is what it does, and what it does is distribute things (who gets what, where, when and how, etc.). Government is, in other words, an arena where interests compete for the realization of preferences in terms of the distribution of governmental goods and services. The relation of the distribution of preferences to the distribution of outcomes is, therefore, the central problem of government. Government is a mechanism for the distribution of rewards and penalties, but it is neutral in form. It only assumes value in so far as it effects a distribution which is thought desirable. Each person will rate that outcome on the basis of his own preference schedule, but if the preferences of all individuals are to be equally regarded, then the government should attempt to maximize the satisfaction of preference by acceding to the preferences of the majority. Populistic democracy is viewed as the most secure means toward the achievement of this end.

The free-will model sees democracy as an end in itself, since it is the only procedure for making collective decisions which is compatible with the value of the political equality of all rational beings in a political community. On this view, outcomes can be evaluated independently of the process by which they were derived in terms of their relative desirability; but the prior question of their fairness is answerable only in terms of the procedures which were followed in obtaining them. This allows for the possibility of democratic choices which are unpalatable from a moral or pragmatic point of view. All that the free-will model asserts is that decisions are democratic if they are an expression of the will of the
majority, and that by the standards of democracy they are right. There are, of course, other standards by which decisions can be evaluated, and Dahl is correct in asserting that no one values political equality and popular sovereignty above all other values. But by establishing the norm of democracy as a general principle, the free-will model at least challenges its detractors to advance another principle to serve as a modifier. If the rationale of the preference model is assumed, it can only be modified by a variant of preference itself, such as intensity. Thus Dahl is required to subsume apparently normative matters under the behavioral rubric of intensity in his fourth chapter.

In order to correct the deficiencies of the populistic model, Dahl introduces his polyarchal model in chapter 3. This model is essentially an attempt to state majoritarian democracy in operational terms. It is interesting to note that, while Dahl tells us that his eight conditions of polyarchy can be regarded as norms (p. 75), they are subject to virtually all of the objections previously brought against the populistic model. Polyarchy does not specify the group to which it is to apply, it cannot deal with ties, does not allow each alternative to be paired with each other alternative, posits a finite number of goals at the expense of all others, is subject to the iron law of oligarchy, would allow the majority to terminate the system, and so on. Thus, it is not immediately clear why it is preferable to populistic democracy. Dahl believes it to be preferable, of course, but not because polyarchy is theoretically more complete than populistic democracy. Rather, polyarchy is preferable because it comports more closely with Dahl's preference for a theory which is operational and measurable. In other words, Dahl seems to be implying that an empirical model is preferable because it is testable. Whether or not an empirical model which is subject to the very same objections as related non-empirical models is adequate, is a question Dahl does not address, and we are left to ponder.

In light of Dahl's critique of Madisonian democracy on the grounds that the validity of its empirical assumptions is not demonstrated, it is interesting to consider his empirical model in more detail. In an appendix (C) Dahl suggests that polyarchy can be analyzed in terms of the presence or absence of necessary preconditions, and their requisites. Specifically, he argues that each of the eight conditions is apt to be maximized if consensus on the norm governing that condition is maximized, and that such consensus
may in turn depend upon the degree of social training in the relevant norm which society provides for its members. All other factors which might affect the fulfillment of the norm are lumped together under the heading of X, a catch-all variable. Now in so far as Dahl’s only intention is to illustrate his method, this is unexceptionable. However, we may ask in the course of thinking about the problem, what other factors might be included in the category X? Specifically, we may wonder if the presence or absence of a constitutional system, or any of its features, might affect social training, consensus or any other precondition of the eight conditions of polyarchy. Indeed, is it not possible that constitutional provisions might not affect certain of the norms in a very direct way, as for example, the norm that "alternatives (leaders or policies) with the greatest number of votes displace any alternatives (leaders or policies) with fewer votes" (p. 71)? Was it not, in fact, Madison’s precise argument that the constitutional separation of powers and checks and balances was necessary in order for this norm to be fulfilled? Now Dahl’s argument against Madison is to the effect that Madison emphasized the need for such constitutional provisions at the expense of social controls. He returns to this theme at the end of his chapter on polyarchy, in order to leave no doubt of it in the mind of the reader (pp. 82-83). This interpretation of Madison is incorrect, as we have seen, but the reverse of it is surely applicable to Dahl. It is clear in his chapter on polyarchy that he emphasizes social controls to the exclusion of constitutional factors, an exclusion equally as arbitrary as the opposite, deriving merely from a different frame of mind.

Chapters 2 and 3 taken together then, represent the hard core of Dahl’s attempt to redefine the direction of political theory. The

13 In Political Oppositions in Western Democracies Dahl says: “Constitutional frameworks and electoral systems, it might be objected, have nothing to do with the characteristics of opposition; we must look instead to social, economic, cultural, or psychological factors. This kind of objection reflects a ‘reductionism’ that seeks to reduce political factors to something more ‘basic,’ just as biophysicists seek to explain biology by evoking the ‘more basic’ laws of physics. Yet just as biophysicists have encountered severe difficulties in reducing biology to physics, to ignore the effects of constitutional and electoral institutions leaves one in serious difficulties” (p. 349). It is interesting to note that in chapter two of this book, Dahl indicates that three types of variables tend to explain the "normal pattern of opposition" in American politics: the characteristic pattern of consensus; the -characteristic pattern of cleavage; the structure of government and politics (p. 35). Dahl proceeds to analyze each of these variables, devoting twelve pages to the first, eleven pages to the second, and a page and a half to the third.
reorientation of political theory away from the abstract, the logical, and the normative, toward the concrete, the operational, and the empirical, is most clearly illustrated here. That the new direction suffers from grave difficulties is apparent on Dahl's own analysis. That these difficulties may derive from a myopic frame of reference is only implied. Nevertheless, we may say that the real significance of the Preface less in its specific arguments than in the "state of mind it (bespeaks)." (p. 83).

III

Having argued at some length that Dahl makes a crucial mistake in predicking his analysis of majoritarian democracy upon the concept of preference, it remains only to determine the implications of this error for his discussion of intensity in chapter 4. In a sense, of course, we may say that if preference is an invalid concept as it applies to the definition of democracy, then intensity as a problem which derives from preference is not a crucial problem for democratic theory. While it makes sense to speak of intensity of preference, it obviously makes no sense to speak of intensity of choice. This is not an adequate resolution of the problem, however, for while it is true that the foundations of the democratic process are not rooted in the concept of preference, it does not follow that preferences are irrelevant to the operation of a democratic system. Therefore the problem of intensity does have a place in democratic theory, although not the one ascribed to it by Dahl. And unfortunately, here, as elsewhere, Dahl's analysis is flawed.

Dahl describes the intensity problem as "almost a modern psychological version of natural rights" (p. 90). Of course, nothing could be further from the truth. If natural rights exist, they have nothing at all to do with intensities of preference, for surely they are intended to be claims which are deontological in nature and therefore both prior and superior to any utilitarian calculus. White people, after all, have been very intense in their desire to deprive black people of many of their rights, but this is hardly a compelling moral factor. The analogy arises in Dahl's mind only because he views both minority preference and minority rights as comparable issues, in the sense that a denial of either might lead to an unstable political system. Stability is something which Dahl values highly, although he never attempts to justify the value which he places on it. In introducing the intensity problem Dahl
cites two reasons why it is of interest. One is "essentially ethical in character" (p. 92) and is simply that *ceteris paribus* the more intense should get their way over the less intense. Dahl tells us that if one child wants an expensive gift, and the other child is not really excited about such things, then the more intense child should get the expensive gift while the relatively indifferent child gets a less expensive gift, or no gift at all. This, according to Dahl, is the way most of us would reason in such ordinary circumstances of day to day living, and he believes that the same reasoning should be applied by society in determining the distribution of its advantages.

Now it is not clear that Dahl's analysis of this problem is as common-sensical as he supposes. In the first place, when are things ever equal among one's children? The parent who is lucky enough to encounter *a ceteris paribus* situation among two or more offspring may be counted fortunate indeed. But the problem here is not merely due to the nature of the example which Dahl has chosen to illustrate his point, for one might well ask, when are other things ever equal when rewards are being distributed? If we may grant *arguendo* that such a situation could arise, we are left to ponder the ethical question which Dahl raises: should intensity be rewarded, and if so, under what circumstances? This brings us to the second point, which is that intensity must eventually conflict with our fundamental notions of fairness. For surely one might argue that common sense (especially the common sense of being a parent) dictates that children be treated even-handedly, even where intense desires are frustrated. Of course, intensity and fair play are not necessarily incompatible, for one might adopt a rule which would require that the more intense should always get their way. What impact such a decision rule would have upon the stability of the system (or family) which adopted it, the reader may ponder.

This point is significant, because Dahl's second argument in support of intensity derives from his interest in our "desire to predict the stability of a democratic system and perhaps even to design rules to guarantee its stability" (p. 92). Whether this reason is as important as the other is not discussed by Dahl. He devotes three short paragraphs to the ethical aspects of the problem, concluding that the ethical considerations must be dismissed on the grounds that they cannot be resolved through observation since intensity is sensate. Happily, the stability problem is susceptible to further study, since overt behavior may be substituted for intensity
of preference; and predictions can be derived from an examination of such behavior as is ordinarily taken to indicate intensity. Therefore Dahl devotes fully six long paragraphs and eight charts to his analysis of the stability aspects of the intensity problem. The crucial problem which it addresses is intensity, yet by the conclusion of the discussion we find that the intensity problem has disappeared. As ethically, the intensity problem could not be dealt with because intensity cannot be observed, so empirically, it need not be dealt with because intensity need not be observed; activity can be taken as its surrogate. Precisely why, we may ask, is it unreasonable to measure a sensate variable on the basis of behavioral indicators for ethical purposes, if it is reasonable to do so for the purpose of predicting behavior? The assumption in both cases is the same: a behavioral indicator is taken to stand for a non-observable state of mind. Leaving aside the question the validity of intensity of preference as a norm in the first place, I do not see why it is the case that, if intensity is to be taken into account, it cannot be measured on the basis of the behavioral manifestations that are usually associated with it. Indeed, I do not see how it could be otherwise. If we cannot substitute some form of behavior (e.g., a vote or a response to a poll) for an expression of preference, then the entire analysis of democracy posed in terms of preference is nonsensical. If we accept behavioral indicators of preference, I do not see why we cannot accept behavioral indicators of intensity.

Dahl’s arbitrary treatment and dismissal of the ethical aspect of the intensity problem further evidences his reluctance to come to grips with democracy as an ethical problem. His equally arbitrary acceptance of the stability aspect of the problem, however, reveals a lack of awareness of the implications of his own analysis. For surely if the only thing we are concerned about is predicting the stability of a political system, and if we can make such predictions by correlating behavior of certain types, then we need hardly worry about the inner springs of such behavior, and need make no assumptions about the relationship between intensity of preference and behavior. All we need to know is how people behave, and how they can be made to continue in, or alter, that pattern of behavior. Therefore it is apparent that the principal problem posed in chapter 4 is not a real one at all. Dahl does not care about intensity. All he cares about is stability. But by approaching stability through the side door of intensity, Dahl avoids the necessity of telling his
readers just why it is that he thinks stability to be an important problem for democratic theory.

Having posed the intensity problem as a contemporary surrogate for Madison's supposed problem of natural rights, Dahl chooses to conclude his discussion of it by returning to the issue of the efficacy of constitutional restraints on majorities in protecting minority rights (= intense minority preferences). He argues that neither judicial review nor the bicameral system has protected intense minorities from majorities, and provisionally concludes "that no solution to the intensity problem through constitutional or procedural rules is attainable" (p. 119). This contention occasions the following observations.

First, Dahl assumes that the delaying effect of constitutional restraints is unimportant, although for Madison and Hamilton, it was centrally important. Second, Dahl assumes that the efficacy of constitutional restraints can only be demonstrated if it can be shown that they operated overtly to prevent a majority from overriding a minority. Since he cannot find such a case, he concludes that constitutional restraints do not. But, of course, this is inadequate since if the existence of constitutional restraints prevents a majority from trying to override a minority, then they have had their intended effect. The evidence adduced by Dahl does not reach this point (the "other face of power"). Third, Dahl does not address all aspects of constitutional government. For example, he does not examine the policy process between the executive and legislative branches of government, which is surely relevant to the effects of the system of separation of powers. Fourth, Dahl's critique appears to assume that the advocates of constitutionalism claim that constitutional rules are capable of guaranteeing the security of minorities. Calhoun sought such a system, but Madison did not believe it possible to protect minorities absolutely in a republican system of government. Finally, Dahl ignores the entire area of procedural due process of law.

Dahl is correct in addressing the importance of intensity, but not for the right reasons. Where, after all, does the intensity problem fit into democratic theory? It is clear from Dahl's own analysis that neither preference nor intensity can serve as a cornerstone of a theory of democracy. Some firmer ethical basis is needed for that. But in terms of determining policy outcomes both preferences and intensity do play a role, since they are relevant factors in deciding what policies should be chosen. That is, they are con-
siderations in the deliberations of policy-makers. Of course, this
does not mean that policy-makers should always be guided by their
perception of the distribution of popular preferences. Other factors
such as justice, efficiency, productivity, and other cultural values
must be given appropriate weight. To insure a correct weighing of
all the variables effecting a policy decision is the primary task of
constitution-makers. As Hamilton put it in number seventy-one:

The republican principle demands that the deliberate sense of
the community should govern the conduct of those to whom they
intrust the management of their affairs; but it does not require an
unqualified complaisance to every sudden breeze of passion, or to
every transient impulse which the people may receive from the arts
of men, who flatter their prejudices to betray their interests. . . .
When occasions present themselves in which the interests of the
people are at variance with their inclinations, it is the duty of the
persons whom they have appointed to be the guardians of those
interests to withstand the temporary delusion in order to give them
time and opportunity for more cool and sedate reflection.

This is the teaching of the Federalist.

IV

In the last chapter of the Preface Dahl asserts seven proposi-
tions which, he believes, follow from his analysis. These seven
propositions characterize what he calls the "American Hybrid."
The first of these propositions, and the most important, is "that
in matters of specific policy the majority rarely rules" (p. 124).
This proposition provides the basis for Dahl's pluralist perspective
that the American political system is one of "minorities rule." It
also undergirds his contention that Madison's problem of majority
tyrranny "is mostly a myth" since "if the majority cannot rule,
surely it cannot be tyrannical" (p. 133). Here, I think, Dahl involves
himself in an extreme inconsistency, and in so doing confirms what
has been evident all along: his own political theory is really
Madison's dressed up in behavioral jargon. The inconsistency is
obvious. The theoretical problem which Dahl stresses as being of
most concern in chapter 4 is severe asymmetrical disagreement
(S.A.D.). S.A.D. occurs when a slight majority mildly prefers one
alternative and a very large minority intensely prefers a mutually
exclusive alternative. Sadly, S.A.D. clearly requires that the majority
is getting its way over the minority. If the majority rarely rules,
then S.A.D. rarely occurs, and is mostly a myth, in the same sense
that the Madisonian problem of majority tyranny is mostly a myth! Presto, the problem of majority rule, which has been at the center of democratic theory for centuries, disappears! And so does Dahl’s entire analysis of majority rule. For we now see that Dahl holds both (a) that constitutional checks do not restrain majorities and (b) that majorities rarely exist!

Dahl contends in chapter 5 that he, unlike Madison, believes that elections are of “decisive importance in the whole grand strategy of democracy” (p. 125). While elections do not often determine majority preference, they do, says Dahl, establish boundaries within which minorities set policy. Constitutional checks are of primary importance, he believes, in that they determine which minorities will assume power. In a brief historical sketch Dahl argues that the American system has evolved from one in which political decisions were controlled by “relatively small elites of wealth and status” during the Revolutionary era to one in which “all the active and legitimate groups in the population can make themselves heard at some crucial stage in the process of decision” (p. 137). Dahl devotes one long footnote toward the substantiation of the first proposition, and no evidence at all to corroborate the second. In regard to the first proposition I must merely point out that it seems to me to be unwarranted. Recent scholarship, including my own, suggests that the Revolutionary period was more democratic than Dahl describes.1 The point is one which historians may never resolve. In regard to the second proposition, we must note that the factual assertion is a matter of debate among students of the American political system. Aside from this factual dispute, however, it is interesting to note how little the proposition means, even if true. For one is entitled to wonder (as many minority groups certainly do) what good is accomplished by having a hearing for the views of one’s group, if one’s group is rarely or never a winner in the policy battle.

Dahl is unwilling to push his analysis of the American system

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1 See Robert E. Brown, Middle-Class Democracy and the Revolution in Massachusetts, 1691-1780 (New York: Harper and Row, 1969); Gordon Wood, The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787 (New York: Norton, 1969); and my The Massachusetts Constitution of 1780: A Social Compact (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, forthcoming 1978). Contrary to Dahl’s statement (p. 140n), the governor was accorded only a limited veto of legislation under the Constitution of 1780 in Massachusetts. Indeed, that constitution served as a model for the federal Constitution in this respect, as in others.
further. He argues, on the one hand, that constitutional forms are apt to favor some groups at the expense of others, and on the other hand that all groups get a hearing in the normal American system. What impact do the constitutional forms which shape the normal American system have then? If Dahl had raised this question he might have turned to Madison for an answer. For it is one of the explicit teachings of the *Federalist* that a republican government will allow policy to be set by a particular minority, a minority of the enlightened and wise. In number ten Madison tells us that the effect of republican government will be to "enlarge and refine the public views by passing them through the medium of a chosen body of citizens, whose wisdom may best discern the true interest of their country, and whose patriotism and love of justice will be least likely to sacrifice it to temporary or partial considerations." Did Madison mean by "a chosen body of citizens" the same thing as Dahl meant by "elites of wealth and status?" Here are Madison's words:

> Who are to be the electors of the federal representatives? Not the rich, more than the poor; not the learned, more than the ignorant; not the haughty heirs of distinguished names, more than the humble sons of obscure and unpropitious fortune. The electors are to be the great body of the people of the United States. . . .

> Who are to be the objects of popular choice? Every citizen whose merit may recommend him to the esteem and confidence of his country. No qualification of wealth, of birth, of religious faith, or of civil profession is permitted to fetter the judgment or disappoint the inclination of the people. (number fifty-seven)

Dahl believes that America was run by wealthy men who ruled in their own interests during the formative years of the republic. Madison did not expect this to be the case. America would be run by elites of merit who would rule in the best interests of the people. Dahl comes down in favor of elections and a fragmented social structure. He depreciates the significance of constitutional factors while not completely assessing their significance. Madison is four-square in favor of elections and believes that the ultimate security against the possibility of majority oppression lies in a fragmented social structure, combined with a constitutional dispersal of power. He too believes that constitutional structures will shape the distribution of political power and he offers an analysis of the likely effect of this fact under the United States Constitution. Whether or not Madison "misunderstood the dynamics of his own society"
(p. 142), he clearly understood the dynamics of his own analysis. In the hierarchy of political theory, this places him above Dahl.

V

Like the "Cheshire cat," Dahl's arguments have "dissolved before our eyes" (p. 20). What, then, are we to conclude about the enduring value of the Preface? Must we say that it fails to live up to its own pretensions? Were the accolades of its reviewers unjustified? These questions can only be answered by considering the importance of the book and the "style of argument" which it presents, for political theory and political science during the past twenty-one years. A useful inroad to this subject, however, will be to again consider the claims of the book itself. For even though its specific arguments are inadequate, its implicit prescriptions stand as a significant challenge to the tradition of political theory.

Political theory has, since Aristotle, been regarded as a practical science. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle divided philosophy (the search for truth) into the theoretical and the practical sciences. In the former category he placed mathematics and metaphysics, and in the latter category he placed ethics and political science. Aristotle did not expect too much precision from the practical sciences; we must not, he believed, expect the same degree of certainty from the practical sciences as we do from the theoretical sciences, because the subject matter of the practical sciences is indeterminate. Nevertheless, the practical sciences are important, thought Aristotle, because they deal with the most important question of all: how ought man live? This question applied to men both individually and collectively, and the answer to it would apply to both men and societies.

Aristotle's depiction of the nature of ethics and politics dominated the tradition of political theory subsequently. The modern philosophers were, perhaps, more cynical about man and more optimistic about science than was Aristotle, but they shared his objective of determining the best possible political order. They, like he, believed that there existed an intimate relationship between ethics and politics, between man and the state, between individual conduct and proper social organization. Corresponding to this set of connections was an equally intimate connection

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15 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Martin Oswald, ed. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962), Book One, chapters two and three; Book Six.
between values and facts. In the modern era, the emphasis of political thought was on the nature of political reality, in order that political values could be more firmly established. The school of thought which provided the basis for modern natural law teachings (e.g., Hobbes and Locke) also provided the epistemological basis for empirical social science.

A Preface to Democratic Theory rejects this tradition on two grounds. First, Dahl either rejects the ethical problem of democratic theory outright, on the grounds that values are not operational (as for example in his discussion of natural rights) or else he subordinates ethical problems to quasi-ethical or ethically neutral considerations for the same reason (as in the case of intensity). Second, Dahl claims that the tradition of democratic theory has failed in its lack of attention to consequences. By stressing theory in the absence of a consideration of fact, democratic theory has developed a number of empirically dubious hypotheses and enshrined them as truth. This is equally true of theories of constitutional democracy, such as Madison's, which place unwarranted faith in the efficacy of constitutional controls, and logical theories of populistic democracy, which stress symmetry at the expense of material consequences. Now it is clear that these related criticisms of democratic theory are significant, independently of the adequacy of the particular arguments by which they are presented. For Dahl is asking his readers to reject the traditional quests of democratic theory in favor of an inquiry into the way in which current political systems operate. Why? Because to do so is more practical. Now the nature of the criticism emerges clearly. The practical sciences have not been practical enough.

But what does practicality mean to Dahl? It seems to me that Dahl's conception of practicality is a combination of two related ideas. The first, and most important idea, is that correct action requires the direction of correct information. This, one supposes, is not necessarily true. Given Dahl's disdain for the American theory of separation of powers and checks and balances, and the general esteem in which he holds the American political system, one might well conclude that Americans have been remarkably successful in blundering their way to the status of a polyarchy. Nevertheless, it is not unreasonable to assume that the search for political truth will be facilitated by a correct understanding of political life. Certainly neither Madison nor Aristotle would have disagreed with this proposition; both were political realists who
dealt with the is before they got to the ought. It is upon the nature of the search for political reality, however, that the second idea underlying Dahl’s conception of practicality rests. That idea is simply that political knowledge can only be certainly attained by following the procedures of science. The path to political understanding, according to Dahl, is and must be marked by the signposts of operationalism, measurement, and so forth, which he specifies in his introduction (p. 1). The entire thrust of the Preface is to argue that the traditional questions of democratic theory must be redefined in terms which lend themselves to empirical methods of investigation. But here, Dahl reverses the Aristotelian sense of practicality. Aristotle held that ethics and politics were the most practical of the sciences, even though they were the least certain. While Aristotle would have agreed that one ought pursue the most certain path available to the sort of knowledge one sought, that knowledge would not have been defined in terms of the certainty of the method of attaining it. The goal of obtaining political knowledge was defined by Aristotle in terms of the larger objective of attaining the good life. Dahl attempts to drive a wedge between ethics and politics, and to confine political theory to the scientific study of political systems. This may indeed be more practical, but only upon Dahl’s notion of practicality.

Now I do not know if Dahl would accept this as a correct statement of his views. I do think, however, that this interpretation of the argument of the Preface is entirely justified off of the text. One of the redeeming features of the Preface, in my view, is the uncompromising manner in which Dahl chooses to make his case. Like many a classic in political theory, the Preface is audacious and hard on its adversaries. But, like other classics, the Preface contains implications which the author himself may not have intended. Whether or not Dahl intended the implications I have drawn from his argument, those implications are there for the finding. And, they were discovered by a generation of behaviorally oriented political scientists who sought theoretical justification for their rejection of many of the traditional tasks of political theory. The behavioral movement in political science, in which Dahl’s Preface was an important force, reached its peak of influence in the middle and late 1960’s. In the 1970’s behavioralism remains institutionally strong, in spite of the fact that many of its adherents have lost their zeal. While the behavioral-antibehavioral dispute is perhaps passe in political science today, we are still living with the consequences
of the discipline's commitment to behavioralism. It is upon those consequences that I would like to focus in concluding this review of the \textit{Preface}.

The behavioral movement in political science has resulted in at least four fundamental changes in the discipline, all of which result directly from its theoretical presumptions. Those changes are:

1. a division of the discipline into narrow subfield specialties;
2. a proliferation in the number of journals, and a reduction in the scope of their articles;
3. a focus upon method in the training of graduate students;
4. a reorientation of undergraduate curricula toward political science as a science, and away from government and politics as subjects about which citizens need to know.

These changes in political science can be illustrated by a variety of phenomena ranging from the number and scope of Ph.D. fields to the writing of undergraduate textbooks in American government. I do not wish to dwell upon the substantiation of these propositions, thinking them obvious. I do wish, however, to comment briefly upon the consequences of these changes. First, the division of the discipline into narrow subfield specialties has made political science less theoretical than it was before. This is due to the fact that the several branches of the discipline have each their own theoretical framework, while the science as a whole has none. Second, the proliferation in the number of journals, and the reduction in the scope of their articles, has led to a fragmented science in which knowledge accumulates, but does not build. Third, the focus upon methodological training for graduate students has coerced many of them into research projects which are justified solely upon the basis of the facts that (a) they are affordable, and (b) they allow the researcher to employ the methodology in which he was trained. Fourth, the behavioral influence led many political scientists to suppose that their function was to train undergraduates to become scientists, not citizens. After all, what can a scientist teach but his science? This trend occasioned the outcries of "irrelevancy" which condemned academic political science in the late 1960's and early 1970's.

The response of the discipline to the claim that political science was no longer relevant should have been a return to theoretical fundamentals. But by the early 1970's the discipline seemed to have forgotten what theoretical relevance meant. Thus, its response was to take its methodology and scientific orientation and apply it to
"policy analysis." The presumption was that the use of the method would be justified not by theoretical relevance, but instead by substantive interest in the policy issues to which it was addressed. The scramble was on for everyone to claim to be a policy analyst, and for research projects to be oriented toward the study of policy issues. But toward what end are these policy studies directed? Presumably, each carries with it its own aim because the policy matter under investigation is important. Extrapolating upon various policy studies, those with a theoretical bent attempt to develop "models" of policy processes. This is theoretical; but it is not political theory, as political theory has been traditionally understood. The "science of muddling through" is at best only indirectly related to the question of the grounds of the legitimacy of the state.

The irony of all this, as I see it, is that the behavioral movement began as a theoretical challenge to the tradition of political theory. Dahl’s reviewers were correct; the Preface was a breath of new air. And the Preface is an important piece of political theory because of the challenge it presents to a tradition which it, in the end, rejects. This is why it ought to be read by anyone who is seriously interested in the study of politics today. But the theoretical challenge which the Preface posed soon reduced to a methodological dogma (in the hands of others). And that dogma became imbedded in the fabric of the academic institution of political science. Between methodological dogma and institutional inertia, political theory was reduced to the status of a subfield specialty, rather than being, as it should, the meeting ground of all who are interested in politics.

It is this institutional legacy of behavioralism which is its most important consequence. In this sense, it seems to me that one can draw an analogy between the Preface as a statement of theory, with behavioralism as its institutional legacy, and the Federalist as a statement of theory, with its institutional legacy, the American political system. The principal difference, in my view, is that experience has not yet proven Madison incorrect.

In any event, let me conclude with the following observations. Political science has not yet faced a number of vexing questions which it should be facing. What, after all, do we stand for as a discipline? Is it our primary task to train our students in the methods and values of contemporary social science, or should we be trying to produce students capable of understanding and critically reflecting upon the enduring problems of government? Are
these goals mutually exclusive, or can we accomplish both with a proper orientation toward teaching? Are our responsibilities the same toward our graduate students as toward our undergraduate students? If not, how do we go about making the necessary distinctions in terms of our curricula and teaching techniques? What role should traditional political theory play in the teaching of our undergraduates and the training of our graduate students? To face these questions, and others like them, is to come to grips with the most fundamental question of all: what is the purpose of our interest in political life? This question has been at the core of political theory since political theory began. It necessarily involves ethical and even metaphysical issues. To lose sight of it is to lose sight of the broadest purpose our discipline has.

In reviewing the *Preface* in 1956, Douglas Morgan admonished Dahl for his lack of concern for ethical matters. In reply, Dahl argued that there are "a tremendous number of important questions in political science the answers to which are patently and unarguably independent of ethical considerations." Dahl went on to extract a list of eleven such questions from the *Preface*, such as, "majorities rarely govern on matters of specific policy," and "national elections reveal very little as to the preferences of majorities." Then he concluded, "are these propositions important? Or are they only trivial? As to that, I had best let the reader decide." Here, Dahl reveals even more explicitly than in the *Preface*, the attitude from which its arguments were spawned. And in the process, he reveals just how far this attitude is from theoretical concern. The question is not, are these important questions? The question is, why is each of these an important question? If Dahl had begun to analyze the significance of his own inquiry, instead of taking it for granted, he might have found out that such "empirical" questions are only interesting for their normative implications. And to determine those implications is the proper and traditional task of political theory.

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16 Morgan, In. I.