

Introduction to the Second Edition

They constantly try to escape from the darkness outside and within by dreaming of systems so perfect that no one will need to be good.

—T. S. Eliot

Although today it is commonly assumed that the American political system is the epitome of a democratic regime, Americans from the late eighteenth century to the present have had difficulty determining exactly what kind of society they had created and what form of government they possessed—or by which they were possessed. This situation has inspired many attempts both to give an account of the nature of popular government, self-rule, or democracy and to judge the extent to which the United States conforms to such an account. John Adams mounted a *Defense of the Constitutions of America* before the creation of the United States Constitution, and from the time of the debates about ratification to the present, Americans have continued to *imagine* their nation's polity. American political science, from its conception and inception, has been a central and unique part of this dialogue. The discipline has consistently defined itself as a science devoted to understanding and valorizing democracy and equating it with the American politics. Both mainstream political scientists and those who seek separate personae as political theorists have, however, been prone, for a variety of reasons, to forget, suppress, or falsify their past. Consequently, they have failed to understand their contemporary intellectual identity.

As the English scholar Bernard Crick stressed, political science has been a distinctly and uniquely *American* social science. Notwithstanding its migration and export to other countries, especially subsequent to World War II, and the waves of foreign influence that have contributed to shaping

it, political science bears a unique relationship to American political life and ideology. And its concerns have been practical as well as scholarly. While political science has sought to give a descriptive and explanatory account of the nature of the American democratic polity, affecting how citizens thought and behaved was, from the beginning, a principal goal of the discipline. It was committed to creating a truly scientific study of politics, but despite changing attitudes toward, and images of, science, there has been a persistent search for a discipline that would have an end in action and that would contribute to realizing and enhancing democratic values and institutions. The imaginings produced by the discipline have, in various ways such as through diverse levels and vehicles of pedagogy and their influence on a variety of media, been sedimented in the perceptions and practices of citizens and political actors.

I have, over a number of years, addressed the conduct of intellectual history, textual interpretation, and the study of concepts and conceptual change. Although I do not want to frontload and overload this study with complex methodological arguments and critiques, it is necessary to clarify the presuppositions informing the research and writing. In tracing the evolution of the democratic concept, I have adopted an approach that I label “internal history,” which stresses the dynamics of conceptual change. This approach was represented in *The Descent of Political Theory* and has consistently and consciously informed this volume.¹

Much of intellectual history begins with an image and assessment of some current state of affairs and then turns to the past to seek evidence for what it takes to be the origins and development of that image. Such externalist rhetorical or “presentist” approaches, whether celebratory and telling a story of progress, or critical and telling a story of decline, have tended to dominate studies of the history of the social sciences. This kind of work has often obscured important aspects of the character of indigenous conversations and transformations within these conversations.

I also want to alter somewhat the distribution of emphasis characteristic of much of recent historical scholarship, which has employed a variety of contextualist approaches that attempt to explain the past in terms of some

1. John G. Gunnell, *The Descent of Political Theory: The Genealogy of an American Vocation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993). See also Gunnell, *The Orders of Discourse: Philosophy, Social Science, and Politics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998); “Time and Interpretation: Understanding Concepts and Conceptual Change,” *History of Political Thought* 19 (1998).

broad account of the social and political ambience. I do not want to depreciate the social and political setting in which political science evolved, but I assume that it is the political scientists' *perceptions* of that setting and of the discipline's relationship to it that is crucial. My claim is that the discipline itself and its university setting is the most relevant context, and my focus is on the internal structure and dynamics of the discourse that is investigated. I give more attention to what might be called the longitudinal dimension of historical analysis, to the archaeology and genealogy of conversations, and to the principal concepts and conceptual changes that have defined those conversations. I have, except where immediately related to a specific claim, largely eliminated references to secondary literature.

The conversations revolving around the *word* "democracy" and the *concepts* to which the word has referred constitute the basic subject matter. I stress this difference between words and concepts, because while historians often claim to be writing the history of a concept, they are actually writing the history of a word, which, in the course of its use, has referred to quite different concepts. And the continuity of a concept may persist with different words assigned to it, as I will argue in the case of "democracy," "liberalism," and "pluralism." Although much of contemporary intellectual history reflects the impact of the late twentieth-century "linguistic turn" in its approach to conceiving and interpreting social phenomena, much of it is still bound to the assumption that what it is uncovering are the thoughts, beliefs, and other mental objects that are expressed in words and actions. I often persist in using the term "idea," but that use is simply a convenience of speech. As Ludwig Wittgenstein and other twentieth-century philosophers have so fully argued, the vehicle of thought is language.²

Finally, something must be said about the perennially vexing question of historical objectivity, particularly in the case of disciplinary history, which has characteristically been so rhetorically motivated. If one should mean by "objective" some perspective that is theoretically neutral regarding the nature of social phenomena, it would be an empty abstraction. If one refers to a position that is devoid of political or ethical focus, concern,

2. For an elaboration of this argument as well as other aspects of my view of conceptual change, see John G. Gunnell, *Social Theory after Wittgenstein and Kuhn: Leaving Everything as It Is* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); *Conventional Realism and Political Inquiry: Channeling Wittgenstein* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020).

or motivation, or that is not embedded in a social setting or is in some manner translanguistic, it would be nearly as sterile. Objectivity, like other modal concepts, has a universal sense, but its ultimate meaning requires context-dependent criteria of application, whether in matters of historical interpretation or refereeing football. There are no substantive criteria of objectivity rooted in either the “facts” or the manner of their apprehension.

While there is no position that is not informed by various theoretical premises, critical concerns, choices of subject matter, distributions of emphasis, and problem orientations, the discursive identity or meaning of what is interpreted is not in the first instance a function of interpretation and interpretive communities. This claim should not be construed as a suggestion that there is some authoritative epistemological standard to which we can repair in order to settle differences between competing historical reconstructions; but a text, or any interpretive object, does have a physical and conventional constitution that is distinct from its interpretation. An interpretation is another text, and the very concept of interpretation carries with it the assumption of a distinction between an interpretation and what is interpreted. What is involved is not the postulation of some given realm of facticity but rather the existence of a conventional datum about which corrigible claims are made.

This study is organized around three closely related and historically overlapping indigenous concepts that, I argue, have been pivotal in demarcating paradigmatic transformations in the meaning of the word “democracy” and the conversations in which it has been featured: *state*, *pluralism*, and *liberalism*. Since the narrative in the following chapters is at certain points necessarily complex, I will offer some thematic guidance.

I begin, in chapter 1, with the claim that there has been, from the time of the American founding, a theoretical paradox that has been a central axis in discussions of popular government. While it was traditionally assumed that a republican government required an identifiable and autonomous people, it was, after the Revolution, difficult to specify any such entity. This search for the public or “people” has been conducted, in two distinct ways. One approach has been to argue that, despite appearances to the contrary, there is, at least latently or potentially, an American people that is the author and subject of government. The other approach has been to argue that a people, as traditionally conceived, is not necessary to achieve the functional equivalent of popular sovereignty. Both of these approaches have tended to adapt the concept of a republic, and later a democracy, to the perceived realities of American politics.

The paradox was distinctly exemplified in the *Federalist Papers*. Although the authors maintained that the Constitution created a popular government that was republican rather than what they understood as a democracy, they had trouble clarifying and defending their continued allegiance to the basic idea of popular sovereignty. The idea of the people, which had been at the core of revolutionary ideology, seemed to have an anomalous ring when juxtaposed to the political ontology advanced by Madison and others.

The founders had limited direct knowledge of republican government. Most of what they had in mind was the Roman republic, filtered through James Harrington's utopian *Commonwealth of Oceana* (1656), which in turn was derived from Machiavelli's *Discourses on Livy*. Harrington's model of republicanism was two "silly girls" trying to share a cake—one would divide and one would choose, and thus assure fairness. In the case of a republic, the senate or upper chamber would propose and a popular assembly would dispose. His view of citizenship was based on property ownership but included an agrarian law limiting the amount. A central idea in Harrington's theory was still, however, that behind the institutions there was an organic people with natural social divisions but a common standard of civic virtue that rose above factional and individual interests. This image of a commonwealth was still alive in the Anti-Federalist claim that a communal people capable of civic virtue could not be sustained in territories larger than the individual American states, a claim to which the Federalists tacitly conceded.

The great autoimmune "disease" of republics, the founders claimed, was factionalism, which, they believed, was not something that could be overcome in American society but was, unfortunately, the very nature of that society. The question was how to create a republic in a socially factionalized America and in the context of a federal system of government. To the extent that the word "people" had a concrete meaning in the *Federalist*, it seemed to refer to the sum of individuals and diverse factions. Madison, we might say, conceived of a virtual people that would arise out of an equilibrium of conflicting social interests and intricate constitutional design.

Political discourse as well as certain commentaries, such as that of President Monroe, kept alive the civic republican image of a people, both capable of and the subject of popular government. In the nineteenth century, academic publicists and the first and second generation of political scientists produced their own version of the people, which was represented

in the concept of the state. While today many tend to look back on the nineteenth-century theory of the state as an archaic formalistic and legalistic doctrine or as an intellectual reflection of American state-building, it was, as I explain in chapter 2, most essentially what amounted to a theory of American democracy. Apart from a reference to the American states, the word “state” had, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, little currency in either politics or political commentary in the United States. The introduction of the concept of the state was largely through the work of the émigré Francis Lieber, beginning about the time that his acquaintance Tocqueville visited America.

Lieber can reasonably be designated the founder of American political science, and his version of the theory of the state fundamentally determined the direction of political inquiry, and the conversation about democracy, in the United States for nearly a century. It may seem today that this concept of the state, based on German idealist and historicist philosophy, and perpetuated and refined by second-generation theorists such as Theodore Woolsey at Yale, Herbert Baxter Adams at Johns Hopkins, and John W. Burgess at Columbia, is little more than an antiquarian curiosity; but what it represented, above all else, was a rather elaborate theory of popular government. Lieber grafted German, largely Kantian and Hegelian, philosophy onto the American university curriculum in moral philosophy that was devoted to practical ethics and civic education. What Lieber, and the later American state theorists who were educated abroad and who imbibed the German paradigm, created was the image of a people that sprung from ancient Teutonic origins, passed through English government, and culminated in the American polity.

Although Americans were, in theory and practice, at first wary of the word “democracy,” it had, by the middle of the nineteenth century, been largely divested of its radical overtones and become a general term of approbation in the United States as well as in many places abroad. Unlike some of his European counterparts and correspondents such as Tocqueville and Edouard Laboulaye, as well as the American historian George Bancroft, Lieber, fearing the possibility of democratic absolutism and “enthusiasm,” still tended to eschew the word “democracy” in favor of such terms as “self-government.” His vision of the state, however, was essentially that of a internally diverse but organically unified people. The most essential feature of the “state talk” of nineteenth-century academic political inquiry, as well as that of public intellectuals such as Orestes Brownson and Elisha Mulford, was that there was a community whose will

not only stood behind government but preceded, in time and importance, the Constitution. This vision often reflected and abetted the conservative ideology of theorists who wished to propagate and justify limited government as well as to curtail democratic populism, while still maintaining the idea of popular sovereignty, and it was in some ways both inspired by and functioned to legitimate the cause of the Union before and after the Civil War. It was, in the end, a theory embraced by ideologically diverse individuals, but above all, it offered a distinct answer to the congenital paradox of American democratic theory, and it extended well into the Progressive era after the turn of the century.

The third generation of political theorists, which included Woodrow Wilson and W. W. Willoughby, continued to affirm the existence and supremacy of the state, but in part in the course of urging a more active administration. This began to blur the line between state and government. In a country of such great complexity and multiplicity, it was difficult to specify the locus of a people, and, eventually, no one did more than Willoughby to empty the word “state” of its original meaning and transform it into an analytical or juristic category and synonym for government. This, however, precipitated a crisis in democratic theory that would not be resolved until the beginning of the 1930s. The decline of the concept of the state as the basis of a theory of democracy was paralleled by the origin and evolution of the theory of democratic pluralism. Chapters 3 and 4, which in some respects represent the crux of this volume, examine this development in detail. Although there is a persistent assumption that there was a fundamental break between the state theory of the nineteenth century and the conceptions of both political inquiry and politics embraced by early twentieth-century social scientists such as Charles Merriam, the continuities in many respects exceeded the innovations. One might very well ask how the largely conservative academic culture that dominated nineteenth-century universities, such as Columbia and Hopkins, produced reformist scholars, such as Charles Beard and Merriam, who were often the students of individuals, such as the archly conservative Burgess, who so significantly transformed American political science. In addition to retaining commitments both to the idea of scientific inquiry and to a political science with a practical purpose, another thread of continuity was a persistent belief in the national state as encompassing both government and community. Much of Progressive politics and political thought continued to be predicated on the belief that there was at least a dormant or incipient political community that could be mobilized and in whose name

government could legitimately and authoritatively act. It was eventually out of the ruins of both traditional state theory and Progressive dreams that a new account of democratic government in America emerged—the theory of liberal democratic pluralism.

As the theory of the state waned during the early years of the twentieth century, there was something of a theoretical hiatus in American political science. In addition to the increased difficulty of sustaining the idea of an invisible people amid a society of such apparent diversity, the decline of the theory of the state was in part a reaction, in the context of World War I, to its German, and allegedly authoritarian, origins. At the same time, the Progressive hope of awakening or reconstituting a democratic public slowly evaporated as social scientists became overwhelmed with evidence of social and cultural variety and contentiousness in America. There was an increased sense that all that existed was complex congeries of interests and groups that exceeded even Madison's account. It seemed as difficult to find the American people as it had been in the period between the Revolution and the Constitution, and increasingly social scientists not only questioned the existence of a natural and identifiable public but even the reality of a public opinion that commentators such as James Bryce had emphasized as constituting the essence of democratic sovereignty in America. There was a growing sense of the loss of a theory of democracy, and in 1907, Albert Bushnell Hart claimed that the American theory of government was, paradoxically, not to theorize. Nevertheless, he expressed the continuing faith that America was a democracy even though he could no longer, any more than most of his contemporaries, account for it theoretically.

By the turn of the century, the term “pluralism” had not, in any substantial manner, entered the discourse of American political science, and it had no place in the language of American politics. Although Arthur Bentley's book, *The Process of Government* (1908), would become a central reference for later pluralist theory, it had little immediate impact, and Bentley never actually employed the term “pluralism.” It was during Harold Laski's brief sojourn in the United States subsequent to World War I, as well as through exposure to the work of other English theorists such as Ernest Barker and A. D. Lindsay, that the word was somewhat accidentally introduced into the conversation of political science. Laski's principal concern, as in the case of Tocqueville, was his own country, but just as Tocqueville posed questions for Americans about the nature of their democracy and the place of associations, Laski left behind him a

debate about pluralism that focused on whether political reality consisted of anything more than an endless process of group interaction with the government functioning as an arbiter. It was, however, difficult for American political scientists to give up the idea that the state was more than government and the agent of a general popular will.

Merriam, like most members of his generation such as John Dewey, recognized certain democratic values inherent in diversity and pluralism, but he was equally impressed with the divisiveness inherent in such difference and with the antidemocratic sentiments and practices of certain groups. He retained the assumption that democracy ultimately required unity, even if, in his view and that of his student Harold Lasswell, it was necessary to introduce it from the top down through social control and civic education. They transferred their hopes for a democratic society to the actions of governmental elites informed by social scientific knowledge, that is, to the pursuit of democratic values through less than what some might consider democratic means. But the exact nature of the American polity remained vague. No articulate image of American democracy and the American political system appeared, for example, in Merriam's principal early writing. Progressive values persisted in the discipline and were exemplified in Merriam's arguments, but the idea of a people behind the complex universe of American politics seemed increasingly less credible.

The strongest riposte to the normative theory of pluralism associated with Laski, was the work of William Yandell Elliott. He spoke for many of his generation when he argued that to give up the concept of the state as a community was, in effect, to give up democracy as well as the very idea of "the political" as a special realm upon which the autonomy of political science and political theory was predicated. He claimed to perceive, but suggested that it was at least necessary to believe in, what he called a "co-organic" community in American political life that was the basis of constitutional government. It was difficult, even for someone such as Dewey, who along with Laski was perceived by Elliott as a purveyor of relativistic pragmatism, to sever the idea of popular government from the existence of a national community. By the end of the 1920s, however, the concept of pluralism had become the core of an empirical account of American politics, a new normative image of democratic practice, and a general theory of democracy as a form of government. For the first time since Madison, an empirical account of social conflict and of group pressures on government was slowly being transformed into a theory of popular government that would provide much of the content of a new

and widely embraced image of democratic identity, which became deeply entrenched in political science.

The descriptive account of American politics as the pursuit of group interest was transformed into an argument about how this process constituted a form of both democratic interaction and representation. The beginnings of such an idea had surfaced in Bentley's work and it was also implied in the early research of individuals such as Peter Odegard and even more explicitly suggested by Pendelton Herring. During the late 1920s and early 1930s, however, a number of individuals, among whom John Dickinson of the most prominent, elaborated a detailed and complex theory of pluralist democracy. This theory challenged what they referred to as the traditional "democratic dogma" in both politics and political science.

At the center of this theory was the claim that all societies consisted of groups seeking their self-interest and that this, at any stage of social evolution, required mechanisms for compromise and adjustment. In the context of modern society, such adjustment was achieved through the medium of government, which functioned as an umpire acting pragmatically in response to the needs of the situation. It was through participation in groups that individuals realized their goals and achieved identity, and it was through groups gaining access to influence, rather than through formal institutions, that democratic representation was most essentially realized. Stability in society was achieved, they argued, through a balance of conflicting social pressures constrained by appropriate enabling institutions and an underlying consensus on the rules of the game. Majoritarian democracy was viewed as a myth that belied the fact that majorities were little more than indefinable aggregations of individual preference, which were democratic only in the sense that they had the capacity, through elections, to produce a circulation of elites.

During the latter part of the 1930s, there was little in the way of a further explicit statement or elaboration of this theory, but Americans, in both politics and the academy, were seeking an account of democracy that would overcome some of the difficulties of earlier constructions as well as clearly identify the United States as democratic and distinguish it from a growing number of totalitarian regimes and foreign doctrines such as communism and fascism. The name for this new democratic identity was "liberalism," and the manner in which pluralism was transfigured as liberalism is a crucial part of the story of the evolution of democratic theory in American political science and the subject of chapter 5.

The concept of liberalism as an American democratic identity was largely invented within a relatively short period during the 1930s. Politicians such as Woodrow Wilson, and later Franklin Roosevelt, began tentatively to court this word as a label for a variety of policy initiatives, but many individuals, including Herbert Hoover, claimed to be liberals. The word “liberalism” gravitated into the language of political science, and historians began writing the history of Western political thought and institutions as a story of the progress of liberalism culminating in the American democratic polity. To the extent that liberalism had a definite conceptual meaning in the literature of political science and political theory, it tended to be equated with pluralism. Many political theorists and philosophers, such as T. V. Smith, took the position that what characterized democracy was less any doctrine and regime than a commitment to toleration and the propagation of diversity within a procedural framework for settling conflicts. By the early 1940s, on the eve of the war, the basic elements of this vision were systematized by individuals such as Herring, and once again presented as the “politics of democracy.” Herring saw his task as taking all that was considered bad about politics—from pressure groups to bosses and soft money—and demonstrating that they were all, if understood scientifically, part of a democratic process.

There was, however, a somewhat subterranean critique of liberal democracy that had begun to infiltrate the discipline. This was largely conceived and executed by émigré scholars who were gaining a place in the literature of political theory. This literature gave rise to a new mode of theory that would eventually force a number of political scientists to make an identity choice between political science and political theory. The confrontation between this critique and the reconstituted pluralist account of liberal democracy defined the dialectic of democracy in the postwar generation and eventually gave rise to a significant intellectual break between mainstream political science and the subfield of political theory.

Chapter 6 presents a very selective account of the democratic conversation after midcentury, but it is in some respects more an epilogue than an attempt to reconstruct the conversation as fully as in the previous chapters. This is especially the case in the last portion of the chapter, where my purpose is neither to survey nor to delve deeply into the complexities of contemporary democratic theory but rather to indicate the extent to which central themes in the discussions resembled, and were in many ways rooted in, the earlier history of political science. While I trace the

conversation about pluralism quite closely up through the decade of the 1960s, my discussion of the subsequent years is more synoptic and probably more contentious.

I argue that after the war what most fundamentally separated the scientific pretensions of behavioralism, which was becoming the dominant persuasion in the discipline, from many political theorists was less a dispute between “empirical” and “normative” theory than two quite different ethical positions revolving around the issue of democracy. By the 1970s, mainstream political science was characterized by a continuing dedication to describing and explaining democracy in the manner in which it had been conceived since the 1930s. During the 1950s, historians and political theorists, such as Daniel Boorstin, had celebrated what they believed to be a liberal value consensus that underlaid American pluralism and functioned as a substitute for an identifiable American public. Louis Hartz criticized the implications of the consensus but acknowledged its existence. The defense of the consensus claim was catalyzed and galvanized by the persistent but often still somewhat submerged attack on liberalism by the predominantly German scholars who, beginning in the 1930s, had emigrated to the United States. They were in many respects a philosophically and ideologically diverse lot, but what they had in common was the belief that liberalism as a political theory was philosophically flawed, and, as a political form, inherently pathological and representative of political institutions that historically, as in the case of Weimar, were the threshold of totalitarianism. This challenge, coupled with the continuing concern about presenting a coherent image of democracy as a counterpoint to communism, was the intellectual context of the postwar reconstitution of group theory and the pluralist theory of democracy in the work of individuals such as David Truman and Robert Dahl. What is striking about this restatement was its failure to recognize, or acknowledge, that it was an attempt to redeem an increasingly besieged theory that had been articulated by the previous generation.

The intellectual and professional split between the subfield of political theory and behavioral political science, which characterized the 1960s and evolved during the 1970s and 1980s, had profound consequences for the future of democratic theory in the United States as well as for the discipline of political science. While political science continued, in various ways and degrees, to validate the traditional pluralist vision, even by viewing the discipline itself as distinguished by a pluralistic structure and attitudes, it tended to concede to political theory the role of norma-

tive theorizing and to relinquish the mission of articulating a theory of democracy. During the 1970s, liberalism was philosophically rehabilitated in the work of individuals as diverse as John Rawls and Richard Rorty, but as these claims became the focus of discussions in political theory, the arguments became increasingly abstract. While, at the same time, in mainstream political science, it was more difficult to find a coherent and shared image of the American democracy.

Within the last decade of the twentieth century, there was a quite fundamental shift in the perspective of academic political theory. The concept of pluralism once again appeared as a centerpiece of democratic theory, but this evoked, or provoked, the resurrection of the traditional counterpoint of organic and communitarian images of a public sphere. Many of the theorists associated with these trends often, however, appeared to be less than fully aware of the past evolution of the democratic concept and seemed condemned to confront once again the paradoxes that had been, for more than a century, at the heart of the conversation in American political science. The philosophical and practical reconciliation of pluralism with democracy may be no easier than it was at the time of Madison, and the shadow of an invisible people continued to haunt the democratic vision.

It is beyond the scope and purpose of this volume to analyze and evaluate the many discussions about democratic theory that have characterized the later part of the first quarter of the twenty-first century. Ever since the ratification of the Constitution, there have been distinct periods in which a particular account of democracy has been dominant. This does not appear to be the case today, but we may not have gained enough historical distance to make a comprehensive assessment. I will, however, offer some tentative remarks.

The word “democracy” continues to be at the core of the language of both mainstream political science and political theory, but although the assumption persists that the United States is a democratic polity, the essential meaning of “democracy” is in many ways as elusive as it was to Professor Hart in 1907. For many people, including those in the media as well as some academic professionals, “democracy” seems to mean little more than what Joseph Schumpeter characterized in 1942 as the method by which citizens elect representatives in competitive elections. This minimalist account had a considerable impact on late twentieth-century political science, and it has more recently been resurrected as suggesting that it provides a check on elite domination rather than simply allowing

for the circulation of elites. Although mainstream political science and the subfield of political theory remain somewhat alienated, there has been a trend toward increased crossover and greater eclecticism in both areas. This has been reflected in the revival of the congenital concern with extending political theory and social science into political practice, not only speaking *about* politics but speaking *to* politics. This, however, has been a perennial problem, which has plagued the field from its inception.

The creation of the American Political Science Association (APSA) in 1903 was in the spirit of recovering the Progressive reformist motivations manifest in the creation of the American Social Science Association (1865–1885). The latter association included some academicians, but its membership was diverse, often religiously and ethically inspired, and addressed issues ranging from hoof and mouth disease to civil service reform. Economics had originally been the most politically radical discipline and the first to break away from the ASSA and join the academy where it believed professional status would aid its practical objectives. But in the end, the demands of the academy and institutional distance from politics only tended to alienate these fields further from the very audience to whom they had wished to speak. By the turn of the century the disciplines of economics and history had also become quite conservative, and it fell to the lot of political science to attempt to rekindle the Progressive agenda of the ASSA. Woodrow Wilson, who became the first president of the APSA but who was also the president of Princeton, bestowed the name “Politics” on the Princeton department in order to suggest a unity between politics and political science. Every annual presidential address to the APSA makes a bow toward the need to be politically effective, but hope for such an identity has remained unrequited. There has been little to suggest that academic commentary has had any significant impact on the practice of politics. There has recently once again been more attention to how ideal models of democracy might be more directly relevant to current political issues. But, as in the past, this has been undermined by simultaneous calls for greater methodological and ideological diversity, which has made it difficult for the discipline to speak with a single voice.

The recent editors of *Perspectives on Politics*, a publication of the American Political Science Association, which was instituted to make political science more politically relevant, argued for what they referred to as “perspectival political theory,” which they believed would lead to theoretical consolidation as well as greater practical effect. But no more than in the case of politics do plural perspectives yield unity. The very

term “perspective” implies a prior assumption about the nature of the object on which a perspective bears—such as democracy. One attempt to avoid this paradox has been the dubious claim that political theory is itself a form of political action.

More substantive and shared recent trends have been toward a critique of what has come to be called “neoliberalism,” which is characterized as the impact of capitalism and markets on politics. There has also been considerable concern about the rise of authoritarian populism in both the United States and abroad. Both of these developments have been taken as a threat to what is vaguely characterized as traditional liberal democratic values. These issues, however, simply increase the urgency to think about the meaning of the democratic concept, both past and present.

In 2002, Dahl wrote a provocative essay asking, “How Democratic Is the American Constitution?,” and this has been followed by a wider discussion about the degree to which a number of institutions are in practice really democratic. This, however, simply brings us back to the issue of clarifying what we mean by “democracy” and what might be considered the logic of democracy. But, as Bob Dylan put it, and again the political theorist Rogers Smith in 1997, “the answer my friend is blowing in the wind.”