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ELITES AND DEMOCRACY: ITALIAN ELITE THEORY, AMERICAN POLITICAL SCIENCE AND THE PROBLEM OF PLUTOCRACY

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CONTENTS

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary political thought has fetishized a product of its own invention: the elite theory of democracy. This dissertation explores how this distinctly modern category of democratic thought came into existence, how it acquired such a stronghold in twentieth century American political science, and why it is based on suspect premises.

It is generally taken for granted that Gaetano Mosca, Vilfredo Pareto, Robert Michels, and Joseph Schumpeter are responsible for the 100-year-old tradition called democratic elitism, or elite democratic theory, which identifies democracy as electoral alternation of office. While it may certainly be the case that these authors became the referents of what was to become the aforementioned tradition, I offer a competing genealogy of the intellectual history, highlighting moments of transition from their original thought to our contemporary understanding of what constitutes democratic elitism.

I argue that those who interpret Mosca, Pareto and Michels as "elite theorists" fundamentally distort their political thought and completely ignore their main objective: containing plutocracy in the age of modern mass politics, partially by disassociating election from popular sovereignty, and consequently, from democracy. Somehow, the cynical views of elite domination and its perversion of the democratic process expressed by Mosca, Pareto, Michels, and even Schumpeter have become, in the hands of Seymour Martin Lipset, Robert Dahl, Carol Pateman, Adam Przeworski and others, celebrations of electoral competition and representative government. I aim to convince readers that we ought to think of Mosca, Pareto, Michels and Schumpeter not as elite theorists of democracy, but rather as democratic theorists of elitism.

The project isolates three constitutive 'moments' in the tradition, surveying authors whose work exhibits this evolution within the century of the reception. Part I focuses on the first moment, or the early phases of the evolution of this interpretive tradition represented by Mosca, Pareto, and

Michels. I unearth their critiques of plutocracy in modern representative government, a long-neglected area of their political thought.

Part II offers an alternative reading of Schumpeter's seminal *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, in which I suggest that we read the work as a dare, or in the hypothetical spirit in which it was originally offered—and not as an ideal prescriptive model of democratic politics.

The final chapter of Part II investigates the reception of the Italian School and Schumpeter's thought in the early development of American political science as a discipline. The chapter assesses how American political scientists such as Robert Dahl, Peter Bachrach, Carol Pateman and Adam Przeworski took Schumpeter up on his dare to redefine democracy as competitive election, thereby transforming both the original contributions of the Italian School and the thrust of *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* as a whole.

In sum, my alternative narrative questions whether we should continue to identify modern democracy as synonymous with fair and free elections, and in so doing, unearths a theory of democracy which might help us disassociate these two concepts in our political vocabulary. The point of this endeavor does not seek to eliminate elections from democratic theory. Rather, I argue, deflating the democratic expectations of electoral politics can help restore the legitimacy of elections and actually revive their proper role in modern popular government.

ON DEMOCRATIC ELITISM
An Intellectual History of American Political Science

Introduction

Democratic Elitism and the Western Tradition

The second half of the twentieth century witnessed an explosion of synonyms for democratic elitism—an abundance that attests to the salience of the category. Minimalist, empirical, economic, proceduralist, Schumpeterian, pluralist, neo-pluralist, equilibrium, realist, and even 'contemporary' all came to denote a model of democracy that champions election as an institutional mechanism; a model of democracy that simultaneously allows for popular participation while actively containing it. Democratic theorists spent the century debating whether this model provides an accurate description of our current political practice and/or a desirable normative ideal.[1] What is more, the prevalence of this model encouraged thinkers to identify themselves within the confines

[1] For some of the most famous models of democracy developed along elite theory lines, see Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963); Bernard Berelson, Paul Lazerfeld, and William McPhee, *Voting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954); Norberto Bobbio The *Future of Democracy*, (Minneapolis: Polity Press, 1987). Anthony Downs, An *Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper, 1957); William Domhoff, *Who Rules America?* (New York: McGraw Hill Companies, 1967 [2006]); David Easton, *A Systems Analysis of Political Life* (New York: Wiley, 1965); Harold Lasswell, "The Elite Concept" in *Political Elites in a Democracy*. ed. Peter Bachrach (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1977); *Robert Putnam, The Comparative Study of Political Elites,* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1976*)*. David Truman, *The Congressional Party*, (New York: Wiley Publications, 1959); Myron Weiner, "Empirical Democratic Theory and the Transition from Authoritarianism to Democracy" in *American Political Science Review*, 20 (Autumn 1987), 861-866; Giovanni Sartori, *Democratic Theory* (New York: Frederick A Praegar Publishers, 1965).

of a convenient binary: either as advocates of the elite model, or as opponents favoring a more participatory alternative.[2]

On some level the appeal of a binary between elite domination and mass participation makes sense. This binary may confirm for many the timeless opposition between mass and elite that lies at the heart of democratic politics (Ober 1989). Nevertheless, however attractive the opposition of elite rule/mass participation may be, this does not explain the proliferation of democratic elitism as a formal regime type *sui generis* among contemporary political scientists. Both the theoretical and contextual conditions of possibility that enabled the elite conception of democracy to emerge are particular to the twentieth century. In fact, the historical genesis of democratic elitism currently remains undisputed: this model purportedly originated with the so-called Italian School of Elitism, comprised of Gaetano Mosca, Vilfredo Pareto, and Robert Michels, who drew upon experiences with failed mass party regimes like Italian parliamentarism and the Weimar Republic; a model refined by Joseph Schumpeter, in response to the twentieth century rise of fascism and communism (Held 2006; Purcell 1973; Higley and Burton 2006).

And yet despite the uncontested identification of democratic elitism as a twentieth century construct, democratic theory has invoked the elite ideal far beyond these temporal confines. Today, many thinkers take our modern understanding of democratic elitism and retrospectively apply it to

[2] For critiques of elite theories of democracy, whether in the form of critiques of behavioralism, rational choice, social choice, or classical sociological elite theory variants, consult Graeme Duncan and Steven Lukes, "The New Democracy" in *Political Studies* 11, 2, (June 1963): 107–256. Benjamin Barber, *Strong Democracy*: *Participatory Politics for a New Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Lane Davis, "The Cost of Realism: Contemporary Restatements of Democracy" in *Western Political Quarterly,* 17 (1964): 37-46; Kenneth Prewitt and Alan Stone, *The Ruling Elites: Elites, Power, and American Democracy*. New York: Joanna Cotler Publishing, 1973); Eva Etizioni-Halevy, *Classes and Elites in Democracy and Democratization* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997); Maure Goldschmidt, *Apolitical Politics: A Critique of* Behavioralism, ed. McCoy and Playford (New York: Thomas Y. Cromwell Company, [1966] 2012); Quentin Skinner "The Empirical Theories of Democracy and their Critics: A Plague on Both their Houses," *Political Theory* 1,3 (August 1973): 287-303; Thomas Bottomore, *Elites and Society* (New York: Routledge Press, [1964] 1993).

the history of western political thought. Whether critical or supportive, some circles of scholarship make sense of the theory by constructing a genealogy of its institutions, logic, and rationale that spans back to ancient Rome, through the Italian Republican city-states and the French and American Revolutions (Hayward 1996; Santoro 2006; Green 2012). Even though Bernard Manin's *Principles of Representative Government,* for example, explicitly asks how two such antithetical concepts—that is, democracy and election, the primary institution of aristo-elitist politics—became coupled, the work ultimately connects Cicero, Guicciardini, Harrington, Sieyès and Publius into a narrative which suggests a fusion between democracy and elitism long before its twentieth century iteration came into view (Manin 1997).

This genealogy has fostered the impression that democratic elitism comes with a two-thousand-year history, and that we ought to structure arguments about what democracy means by investigating such moments in the tradition through the lens of elite vs. mass participation. Consider, for instance, a quarrel between Philip Pettit and Nadia Urbinati over the Roman republican legacy. Pettit's corpus urges a recovery of a Roman conception of freedom as non-domination in order, ultimately, to justify the equation of republican practices and democratic commitments. In response Urbinati bristles at the thought of glorifying these 'Roman institutions of democratic contestation' because even such phrasing strikes her as, at best, paradoxical: neo-Athenian democratic and neo-Roman republican values (such as the negative understanding of liberty, for example) are rival phenomena because the latter explicitly aim to constrain active mass participation in governance (Pettit 2012). Urbinati accuses Pettit of being the heir of an elitist and anti-democratic Roman tradition that expresses anxiety over popular participation and positive engagement—one that is comfortable with leaving governance in the hands of the wealthy, as she says in "Competing for Liberty," and of judges and experts as she claims in "Unpolitical Democracy" (Urbinati 2012; 2010).

However, through her accusation of Pettit's (and republicanism's) elitism, Urbinati characterizes her opponents as democrats. These "unpolitical" champions of republicanism, she claims, are critics of democracy "from within"—critics whom she admits strive to promote "decisions truly informed by and consistent with the principles of liberty and equality that democracy itself proclaims," and therefore should be considered democrats of some form notwithstanding her disagreement with them (Urbianti 2010). In other words, while the genealogy she constructs seeks to dislodge the democratic element from republican theory and expose these thinkers as elitists, she ultimately identifies her interlocutors as democrats, albeit the "unpolitical" kind. They are, in effect, democratic elitists. And the recognition of republicanism as a form of democracy, however "disfigured," serves to further solidify democratic elitism as a legitimate form of democratic—and not just popular—governance (Urbinati 2014).

Questions

Debates structured like Pettit's and Urbinati's are common in contemporary political thought (Pateman v. Dahl; McCormick v. the "Cambridge School"; etc.). Even when the elite theory of democracy is not explicitly at issue, the argument space easily becomes divided between two camps: one more visibly 'elitist' hegemon, and an upstart contender that proclaims itself to be non-elitist because of its self-professed commitment to a participatory ideal. The latter contingent continually centers its energies on critically demonstrating the elitism inherent in the former's political vision all the while accommodating it as a conception of democracy nonetheless. I suspect that critiques launched along these lines make democratic elitism more legitimate and more appealing to contemporary ears than they otherwise would be because they reinforce its perception as a credible democratic regime type.

I have often wondered whether aggressive attempts to expose elitism in varieties of contemporary democratic theory are productive for those interested in encouraging participatory norms of a forward-looking democratic progressivism. To be clear, I find genealogical inquiries that assess the sources and lineages of elite theories of democracy extremely valuable; but I would like to investigate elite theory derivatives in a different way. Instead of mining the texts of canonical figures for the elitist antecedents of democratic elitism, my question generally focuses on whether these purported elitist and anti-democratic figures in the history of political thought are as elitist as we take them to be. If this proves to be the case, and they are not as elitist as we take them to be, democratic elitism is robbed of one foundation for its legitimacy. At the very least, this type of inquiry could undermine established notions of the genealogy itself and generate new approaches to and interpretations of these texts.

To this end, this study re-examines where, exactly, the twentieth-century conception of democratic elitism came from, and why elite theories of democracy became so central to American political science.

Conventional wisdom holds that democratic elitism is a direct offshoot of the Italian School of Elitism begun by Mosca, Pareto, and Michels. My point of departure is therefore to ask whether these forefathers of the tradition are accurately portrayed in later formulations. I contend that the subsequent iterations mark rather startling departures from the original formulation, both substantively and methodologically. Specifically, I ask how the Italian School's concern over plutocratic tendencies inherent in liberal institutions completely disappeared in this current of intellectual history, and how these theorists perversely came to be seen as unqualified defenders of representative systems instead of what they actually were: democratically motivated critics of the conflation between democracy and electoral government.

If these departures do indeed exist, as I argue, the rest of my project takes up the question of how American political science preserved the focus on the study of elites but ignored the Italian theorists' obsession with the relationship between liberal institutions and plutocratic socio-political arrangements. Relatedly, I question why Pareto, Mosca, Michels and then Schumpeter are mistakenly thought to advance 'scientific' approaches in conducting social science, and what this says about the relationship between their methodology and the postwar explosion of positivism in American political science.

Most importantly, my project asks: What do these distortions say about the state of American political science and its political commitments? Why did twentieth century American political thought so forcefully articulate the elite theory of democracy and construct what I will demonstrate is a rather suspect genealogy? What purpose did it serve in developing contemporary democratic theory as we now understand it, and are we now still constrained by the myth of a school of thought that, I will suggest, might have never really existed?

Answers

Some answers to this last complex of questions immediately suggest themselves. The three conjectures I offer below derive from different angles through which to approach democratic elitism, and exhibit the variety of disciplinary trends that are influenced by the category. These possible explanations will constitute the backdrop of my inquiry.

First, as I intimated above, the prevalence of democratic elitism in contemporary political thought may have something do to with the familiarity of the categories 'elite' and 'mass.' This familiarity prompts authors to strategically employ the binary in order to align their own theories with democracy to the exclusion of their rivals. Such tactics seem especially compelling in a time when modern popular governments increasingly rely exclusively on representative mechanisms that

appear to deviate from democratic models of antiquity. To return to the debate over Roman values, Urbinati constructs a genealogy of anti-democratic thought that allegedly attests to Pettit's elitism. The accusation serves as a foil which enables her own identification with the Athenian tradition to seem less elitist than Pettit's position, despite the fact that her project is ultimately motivated by an attempt to defend many of the same representative practices he endorses (Urbinati 2006).

Another explanation for the deviation stems specifically from the history of American political science. The falsification of the Italian theorists could have been partially motivated by a postwar ideological desire on the part of American political scientists to construct a foreign, more extreme understanding of "elite equilibrium," "the ruling class theory," or "the iron law of oligarchy"—one conveniently linked to fascism—so that they could posit their own theories as less elitist and therefore more palatable to an American "democratic" public in the midst of a "Cold War" struggle with a more totalitarian enemy. This foil allowed thinkers like Seymour Martin Lipset and Robert Dahl to articulate a theory of democracy that not only made the plutocracy that the Italian thinkers feared more permissible, but it also eliminated the intellectual concern over plutocratic tendencies in liberal democracy and obscured a potential resource that we might draw upon to think about plutocracy's modern manifestations.

Apart from this sinister interpretation, it could also be the case that twentieth century American political scientists faced a very different set of political concerns than those Pareto, Mosca and Michels confronted, and therefore interpreted these forefathers of the tradition from another perspective. Thomas Picketty's *Capital in the Twentieth Century* demonstrated that the post-World War II generation in Western Europe and North America experienced an unprecedented and highly abnormal level of material equality (Picketty 2013). Consequently, he argues, although plutocracy had previously appeared to social scientists and historians as a trans-historical phenomenon, the second half of the century was able to legitimately marginalize this issue and instead focus on what

they found to be a more pressing concern: containing totalitarianism and authoritarianism that, at the time, many believed originated in the failure of excessively participatory government structures. Theorists like Lipset and Dahl thus looked to the Italian School with different eyes and a new problem-space to resolve. As such, American scholars read Pareto, Mosca, Michels, and even Schumpeter with more optimism about plutocratic containment than had been possible for the Italian school, and therefore underscored other elements in their texts at the expense of ignoring their most explicit anxieties.

Obviously none of these conjectures are mutually exclusive, nor are they exhaustive. But all of them, to my mind, are either flawed or limited in some capacity for reasons that I elaborate below. I hope that detailing how, exactly, elite theories of democracy evolved so dramatically from the Italian's positions will not only help us better understand the extent to which each of these variables played a role in shaping the intellectual history of the period, but will also bring to light other potential explanations I have not yet discovered. The next section speaks to the method I adopt for tracking this evolution.

Historicizing the Present, and Our Temperaments

Given my reliance on the example of Pettit and Urbinati that I use throughout this introduction, the choice to confine myself to the twentieth century and to the American reception of the Italian tradition may seem odd. Why not, for instance, pursue the line of argument where more canonical figures became the object of inquiry if, as I argue, the category of democratic elitism colors the way we structure debates in democratic theory and the history of political thought more expansively? A few thoughts urge me in this more limited direction.

Most obviously, since the elite theory of democracy as a formal category coalesced in the twentieth century, it makes sense to start here and genealogically recover the family resemblances

within its more immediate context. My intellectual history aims to isolate the layers of re-description that obscured the Italian School's main contributions (or at least what I venture they understood as their main contributions) ultimately to both undermine the cohesion of democratic elitism as a formal category and the current intellectual history that often undergirds it. I believe that this type of work is the necessary first step in the process of determining whether and to what extent democratic elitism shapes the way we read many figures in western political thought.

Moreover, my project constitutes an effort to historicize thinkers in the second half of the past century, as opposed to succumbing to the (quite understandable) tendency of treating these contemporary authors simply as interlocutors in our present. Not only do we have enough distance from Lipset and Dahl to effectively do so but analyzing their effect on our discourse will cast a new perspective on the elite theory of democracy, and in doing so, make us more aware and sensitive to its weight in our thinking.

Finally, an important part of my approach to this alternative intellectual history turns on tracking the shifting rhetorical dispositions that underwrite democratic elitism. I understand this part of my project as integral to the genealogy I offer and as generative of the larger political claims that I wish to make. I view tracing the transformation of dispositions or moods (and not necessarily comportments or passions) in elite theory as derivative of some types of affect theory. In line with mapping the public import of private feelings, I investigate how the various dispositions imbued in these texts effected the reception of elite theory varietals (Ahmed 2010). In what follows I contrast the Italian pessimism over plutocracy and oligarchy with Schumpeter's sardonic irony, Dahl's hopeful ambivalence, Bachrach and Pateman's panic, and Przeworski's unqualified optimism in order to highlight how these moods served as imperatives for various—and contrasting—political ends. I contend that unlike the pessimism at work in the Italians, hopeful ambivalence, outright panic, and unqualified optimism *all* worked as imperatives to obey and/or be content with

plutocratic tendencies and liberal institutions—and not just as a resignation to the best of modern alternatives. My intellectual history will thus offer a genealogy of rhetorical affect by tracing the rhetorical dispositions apparent in the texts I survey.

Argument

What follows is therefore premised on the following idea developed in the preceding discussion: it is generally taken for granted that Mosca, Pareto, Michels, and Schumpeter are responsible for the 100-year-old tradition known as elite democratic theory. And while it may certainly be the case that these authors became the referent for the aforementioned tradition, I offer a competing genealogy of the intellectual history, not only highlighting family resemblances but also moments of transition from the Italians' political thought to our contemporary understanding of what constitutes "democratic elitism." I argue that those who interpret Mosca, Pareto and Michels as "elite theorists" fundamentally distort their political thought and completely ignore their main concerns: 1) containing plutocracy in the age of modern mass politics and, relatedly, 2) disassociating election from popular sovereignty, and consequently, from democracy. Somehow, the cynical views of elite domination and its perversion of the democratic process expressed by Mosca, Pareto, Michels, and even Schumpeter have become, in the hands of Seymour Martin Lipset, Robert Dahl, Carol Pateman, Adam Przeworski and others, celebrations of electoral competition and representative government.

The project isolates three constitutive 'moments' in the tradition, surveying authors whose work exhibits this evolution within the century of the reception. Part I focuses on the first moment, or the early phases of the evolution of this interpretive tradition represented by Mosca, Pareto, and Michels. My narrative tracks how the Italian School's concern over the threat of plutocracy was suppressed, and their aspirations for political transparency discounted. As opposed to understanding

these figures as conservative elitists oriented against mass political participation beyond the moment of election, their thought should be understood as an attempt to dispel the equation of democracy and electoral institutions in order to elucidate the threat of plutocracy inherent in representative systems, and, consequently, to promote a stronger commitment to popular government on more—and not less—egalitarian grounds.

Part II offers an alternative reading of Schumpeter's seminal *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, in which I suggest that we read the work as a dare, or in the hypothetical spirit in which it was originally offered—and not as an ideal prescriptive model of democratic politics. When read in this manner, Schumpeter's political thought becomes a far more equivocal endorsement of the conflation of democracy and election, and less obviously a cornerstone for the development of democratic elitism than is currently understood.

The final chapter of Part II takes up the third moment in the history of democratic elitism. It investigates the reception of the Italian School and Schumpeter's thought in the early development of American political science as a discipline. The chapter assesses how American political scientists such as Robert Dahl, Peter Bachrach, Carol Pateman and Adam Przeworski took Schumpeter up on his dare to redefine democracy as competitive election, thereby transforming both the original contributions of the Italian School and the thrust of *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* as a whole.

The Italian affiliated intellectuals are not remembered as critics of plutocracy for a variety of reasons; but most significantly, I argue, due to a misreading of the pessimistic tradition to which they belong and the accompanying literary sensibility they expressed. Pessimism is a philosophical approach that emphasizes human limitations in order to provoke self-conscious confrontation with fundamental obstacles to human flourishing.[3] Educated in the late nineteenth century—a time when

[3] While pessimism has been recognized as a German intellectual discourse, Joshua Dienstag brilliantly demonstrates that pessimism is, at the very least, a broadly European tradition that dates

pessimism reached its apex within European discourse—Mosca, Pareto, Michels, and in some respects Schumpeter, I contend, are better situated within the tradition of pessimism than the elitist one with which they are currently affiliated. Much like famed pessimists such as Nietzsche, Weber, and Ortega y Gasset, the authors discussed here offered pessimistic accounts of democracy and posited grim conclusions concerning the future of European liberalism that were mistaken for celebrations of oligarchic domination as opposed to cautionary warnings.

Of course, authors who subscribe to pessimism are not all the same; nor does one need to be aware of this philosophical discourse to appreciate the pessimism of a particular figure. In order to assess the value of various kinds of pessimism and other affective postures, I propose a mode of reading that focuses on what I call literary 'sensibility' or 'disposition' within a particular historical-intellectual context. To be clear, by disposition I do not mean a psychological condition or internal temperament; instead I refer to a rhetorical tone and nuance detectable within a text. Dispositional readings can alert us to such sensibilities so that one may find in texts something critical that otherwise seems dispassionate or prescriptive, as was the case with the Italians and Schumpeter; or conversely, something that seems ambivalent but should be considered resigned or sanguine, as was the case with Lipset and Dahl.

Therefore I shall trace the shift, over time, in the literary dispositions that undergird what we now call "elite theories of democracy." I identify the rhetorical sensibility expressed in each moment: contrasting Italian pessimism and Schumpeter's sardonic irony with American postwar optimism. By isolating these dispositional expressions I demonstrate the ways in which these different literary

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back to the Enlightenment–if not the Renaissance. Dienstag illuminates the pessimistic orientation as a philosophical response to modernity and rescues the orientation from neglect in Western philosophy. I believe that Mosca, Pareto, Michels, and Schumpeter are a part of the tradition as Dienstag describes it. Joshua Foa Dienstag, *Pessimism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006). See also Frederick Beiser, *Weltschmerz* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

moods served as imperatives for various—and contrasting—political ends. I argue, somewhat counter-intuitively, that the pessimism and irony expressed respectively by the Italian School and Schumpeter left open possibilities for democracy seldom recognized within the "elitist" model; and that, conversely, the Americans infused optimism into this understanding of representative government with perniciously complacent consequences for subsequent democratic theory. Specifically, Dahl's hopeful ambivalence expressed in his "nouveau elitism" induced American political science to live content with narrow empirical orientations to democracy, with constricted liberal institutional choices, and with plutocratic tendencies. While Schumpeter's work undoubtedly provoked the perverted American reception of the Italian School, attention to the irony through which he conducts his socio-economic analysis and conveys his political prescriptions, I insist, ought to change the way we perceive the elite "tradition."

In what follows I complicate what we understand as "elite" democratic theory, and question whether the purported "patriarchs" of this school deserve the name (Nye 1977, 47). Put differently, the analysis asks what is lost when we assume that their connection with contemporary scholarship on electoral politics and representative government is contiguous. I refer to the Italians as the "forefathers" of this tradition in deference to the common understanding of these thinkers, and not to designate them as genuinely elitist in any normative way. On the contrary, I aim to convince readers that we ought to think of them not as elite theorists of democracy, but rather as democratic theorists of elitism. In a discipline where "elitist," "minimalist," and "Schumpeterian" are used interchangeably and pervasively, it is time we recover how these terms came into existence before we pass judgments over their normative import. A genealogical recovery of their thought not only disrupts the habit of debating the empirical validity or normative desirability of contemporary elite models; such a recovery may also newly equip proponents of greater democratic participation, as well as others who fear the increasingly pernicious impact of plutocracy upon democracies.

Democratic Elitism as a Trope

Given the argument articulated above, one might suppose that my project aims to banish any discussion of democratic elitism from contemporary political thought. If the elite theory of democracy is in some respects a myth, why continue relying on it for modern explorations of what constitutes current democratic practices?

Here I find a parallel with Renaissance studies instructive. Canonical Renaissance figures employ a famous trope whereby they insert speeches into their texts, and they impute authorship to the speaker or they attribute corroboration of its content to some other personage. This trope often comes accompanied by a forceful insistence that such a speech did indeed occur, more or less verbatim, at a rather specific historical juncture. Petrarch, Bruni, Machiavelli, Guicciardini and, as a matter of fact, most Italian Renaissance figures often include such speeches and "transcriptions" as rhetorical devices in their political thought.

Contemporary interpreters were not only familiar with the trope, but they knew, at the very least, to proceed with caution when they came upon its use. Most readers are inclined to completely reject the notion that the speech (in fact or via transcription) actually took place, and instead look to its broader function in the work, or consider how to make sense of its substantive claims in light of the knowledge that the speech most likely never occurred (at least not in remotely such a form). Following the etymological significance of trope, which originally intended to convey a 'turning away from,' the use of the trope in Renaissance scholarship constitutes an invitation to pivot and change direction precisely because the veracity of the claim is in question.

Each of my chapters advances the suggestion that democratic elitism is a trope that contemporary political theory relies upon in order to make its own diverse claims about what democracy means today. However, the problem with this usage is not the reliance on the trope itself,

but rather that we do not acknowledge, either implicitly or explicitly, democratic elitism as such a foil. Instead, we think of it as some kind of ontological foundation of twentieth century democratic theory as opposed to a trope, one through which we are beckoned to pivot and play with other conceptions of democracy indeed because the legitimacy of democratic elitism is doubtful. While the Renaissance trope operates on the assumption that the contents of such speeches are false for the purposes of the authors composing them, we take the invocations of the "elitist theorists" by Lipset, Dahl, Bachrach, Pateman, Urbinati, etc. at face value.

This project seeks to make democratic theory more aware of democratic elitism's function as a rhetorical device in contemporary political thought. While I argue that democratic elitism is indeed a myth that twentieth century, American political science constructed, eliminating the trope from our political vocabulary may not only be unrealistic, but might also inhibit its most productive use. By exposing this myth, I hope to convince readers that finding new ways to discredit elite theories as valid conceptions of democracy is a waste of time. Instead we ought to look at such a strawman as an invitation to pivot and explore new avenues of democratic justification. In this sense, the lie constructed in the twentieth century can still be fruitful.

PART I

THE ITALIAN SCHOOL OF ELITISM
Pessimism constrains plutocracy

Introduction

> Pursuit of the unattainable is not always a waste of time, and the futility thesis, correctly understood, need not be a counsel of despair
>
> —Joseph Femia, *Against the Masses*

For the last century, the Italian School of Elitism, comprising Pareto, Mosca, and Michels, has been regarded as the founders of elite theory. These authors are remembered as champions of elite power who were distrustful of increased mass political participation in industrialized society. As a result, Pareto, Mosca and Michels, it is argued, endorsed representative institutions because such procedures allow for popular participation while actively constraining its most deleterious effects.

My genealogy reverses this narrative of the Italian School's contribution to democratic thought. Pareto, Mosca and Michels, I contend, investigated elite power in order to constrain plutocratic infiltration of representative government. More specifically, they were methodologically driven to combat plutocracy by exposing the myth that electoral outcomes express popular sovereignty, and therefore facilitate democracy. Presuming that pessimistic exposure of plutocracy would revitalize animus against it, they sought to curtail its growth and neutralize its most objectionable excesses in representative systems. Each of their expositions analyzes different features of representative politics to reveal how electoral procedures enhance elite domination of the majority; such procedures, for the Italian School, neither secure majoritarian interest nor pose an adequate constraint on leaders' authority. These authors take up the following three claims:

Pareto highlights the connection between governing and non-governing elites to show that parliamentary elections render politicians beholden to financial and military leaders by virtue of economic interests (Chapter One).

Mosca details the ways that minorities use the organization of representative institutions to increase their access to wealth and consequently consolidate their power under the color of a legitimizing "democratic" façade (Chapter Two).

Michels investigates political party structure to conclude that parties require a necessarily plutocratic organization to advance their platforms, a feature which precludes egalitarian distribution of resources and power (Chapter Three).

Rather than harboring disdain for mass political incompetence, Pareto, Mosca and Michels harbored a distrustful orientation towards elites and a "realistic" or pessimistic posture toward the democratic possibilities of liberal (representative or parliamentary) government. They expressed this attitude not to encourage resignation, but to spur action to fight these tendencies. Of course, pessimism is not foreign to the history of political thought, but unlike, say, the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, the Italian School is almost never considered in such a light. To the contrary, they are considered the most conservative, anti-egalitarian coterie of fin de siècle political scientists—more clever, cynical heirs to the continental counter-revolutionary thinkers, Bonald, de Maistre and Donoso-Cortés.

Contextualizing the environment in which the Italians wrote corrects this misunderstanding of what motivated their pessimistic orientation toward liberalism. Moreover, it helps unearth their political contribution to democratic theory, which can be summarized by the following three precepts:

1) Democracy requires continual contestation of elite power and vigilance against plutocratic encroachment that can easily go undetected under liberal-representative arrangements.
2) Democratic action must focus on continual redress of material inequality. For Pareto and Mosca this meant addressing economic regional disparity between North and South; for Michels it meant imposing mechanisms that would equalize access to education and "economic status."
3) Democratic theory must consider elites, their motivations and their modes of operation just as much as it promotes mass movements, a horizon-broadening that in no way undermines its popular or egalitarian character.

This conception contrasts with the other currents of democratic thought because it is attentive to the majority/minority divide, alive to the necessarily contestatory element of democratic politics but nonetheless is specifically directed at an elite audience. Pareto, Mosca and Michels are intent to show their peers within the ruling classes that democratic institutions and accountability are stabilizing forces on a polity; against the view that such procedures invite tumultuous mob rule, they actually constitute the only forces that keep such violence at bay.

The Italian School's view of democracy thus does not confine itself to specific institutional principles or conditions that must be fulfilled in order to identify a state as democratic. Most obviously, Mosca, Pareto and Michels' works reject the static criterion of fair and free elections that postwar political scientists would invoke as the necessary condition for designating a regime democratic, a criterion that defined American political thought from Dahl to Przeworski. Neither does their thought bear any resemblance to a Rawlsian conception of justice which demands a priori identification of the principles that would underpin a "well-ordered" society and the institutional means to satisfy such principles (Rawls 1999). The Italians insist that such principles can seem to be

advanced by the very institutions that pervert them, and therefore they reject any a priori conceptualizations or "ideal theory" in their formulations. Far from being interested in the Habermasian "siege model" or Sheldon Wolin's "fugitive" ideal of democracy that are fixated on popular movements, Mosca, Pareto, and Michels were not advocating fleeting, insurrectionist, defensive positions of mass organization in moments of crisis (Habermas 1986; Wolin 2016). The Italian conception of democracy speaks to elites about the necessity of continually reconstituting democratic procedures before such moments of breakdown; their pessimism aims to prompt a preemptive, aggressive posture—an offensive/defensive strategy, as it were—and not a purely defensive one.

In this sense, the Italian orientation toward democracy does not simply rest on the presence of constant "movement," nor does it regard contestation of elite power as an end in itself (Drochon 2020). From the Italian perspective, pessimism must be seen as an instrument. It is, in fact, supposed to *do* something: When married to a combative orientation, Pareto, Mosca, and Michels intimate, pessimism can help enact change for the better. As such, contestation serves as the means to implement procedures that advance economic equality, often by demonstrating the interest elites have in adopting such measures.

For Mosca and Pareto in particular, circulation of elites or competition among them, fostered through liberal institutions, is simply not enough to qualify a regime as democratic, whether in its modern formulation or otherwise. Both of their life projects were devoted to fighting against the conflation of election and democracy because, through plutocratic domination, this equation made democracy impossible. They believed that the representative-democracy nexus sullied the benefits of representative forms of popular government because it increased democratic expectations of elections and facilitated plutocratic outcomes. When electoral institutions fail to provide the democratic results that it promises, the regime's entire legitimacy is called into question.

Michels, as Chapter Three explains, presents a more ambiguous understanding of the conflation of election and democracy. Most commentators argue that if any of these three thinkers could be conceived as a democratic theorist, it would be the non-Italian of the group, the German-born Michels. In the conventional understanding, the German émigré to Italy applies Pareto and Mosca's thought to a conception of modern democracy in which competition among elites constitutes its defining feature, thus rendering his infamous "iron law of oligarchy," or the inevitability of oligarchy, not nearly as inflexible—and in fact far more democratic—than one might think. According to the existing literature, Michels used Mosca's and Pareto's elitism to produce what in actuality was merely a "bronze law" of oligarchy from which we could convincingly develop a new view of democracy based on liberal elections (Linz 2006, 63; Sartori 1987, 149).

Through the following three chapters, I challenge this view that Michels democratized Pareto and Mosca's thought through his emphasis on elite competition. If anything, Michels initiated the corruption of Italian democratic theory by opening the door to efforts validating the conflation of elections and modern democracy, a presumption that has now become so pervasive that this idea, and not the inevitability of minority domination, seems too formidable a force to resist.

My revisionist genealogy hopes to recover an Italian political precept that may serve us in our own moment: As the Italians argued, equating election and democracy is not a mere matter of semantics; rather, it occludes plutocratic threats that inhere within representative systems, ultimately destroying the distinct contributions that both representation and democracy potentially offer popular government.

CHAPTER ONE

AN ANGRY WARNING
Pareto and Elite Equilibrium

> Votaries of extreme laissez-faire may cull plenty of passages from [Pareto's] writings in support of their views. Yet there was nothing he despised so thoroughly as the 'pluto-democracy' or 'pluto-demagogy' of liberalism.
>
> —Joseph Schumpeter, *Ten Great Economists*

As Talcott Parsons once observed, Vilfredo Pareto was most certainly a "knocker, not a booster" (Parsons 1936, 293). No study of Pareto fails to mention the particularly aggressive, desperately critical tone that has come to define his œuvre. This "unpleasant," "utter cynicism" often helps interpreters explain the wildly varying political positions that Pareto purportedly maintained throughout his life (Bobbio 1972, 59; Aron 1965, 115).

On this register, studies of Paretian politics invariably fall into two camps.[1] The first underscores the early Pareto: the engineer and industrial railway president, journalist, and political activist who embodied the fanaticism of a "Manchester" liberal—a severe laissez-faire type, typical of the nineteenth century, who excoriated government intervention of all types at all costs (Meisel 1965, 10).[2] The second camp instead focuses on the more mature Pareto: the disillusioned and

[1] Tellingly, Pareto has often been called both the "Karl Marx of the Bourgeoisie" and the "Karl Marx of Fascism." See, respectively, Giovanni Bousquet, "Vilfredo Pareto, sa vie et son œuvre," in the *Collection d'études, de documents et de témoignages pour server a l'histoire de notre temps*, (Paris: Payot, 1928) and Vincenzo Fani, quoted in Placido Bucolo, *The Other Pareto* (London: Scholar, 1980), 285-6.

[2] Talcott Parsons and Lawrence Henderson, founding members of Harvard's Pareto circle, were committed to reviving Pareto's liberal credentials. Lawrence Henderson "The Science of Human Conduct: An Estimate of Pareto and One of His Great Works," *The Independent*, CXIX: 4045 (December 10, 1927). Talcott Parsons, *The Structure of Social Actions* (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1949), 299-300. Some of these commentators avoided the fascist question entirely, while

aristocratically fastidious scholar who, after emigrating to Switzerland in the 1890's, wrote the "proto-fascist" academic tomes which first gave concrete expression to the authoritarianism that would engulf Europe soon after his death.[3] For both those who valorize the politically active journalist of the liberal period and those who denigrate the older, embittered proto-fascist, 1899 presents an abrupt turning point in Pareto's orientation, but one that ultimately makes sense given his alleged dread of "mass society."[4] At different points in his life, it is consistently argued, Pareto's pessimism reflects a supreme distrust of increased mass political participation in industrialized societies, channeled through his early disdain of socialism and his later "hatred and vilification of democracy" (Zanden 1960, 399).[5]

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others rebuked the label as "sheer poppycock." Sidney Hook, "Pareto's Sociological System," *The Nation* CXL: 3651 (June 26th, 1935), 747-48. For an intellectual history of the Pareto circle, see Joel Isaac, *Working knowledge: making the human sciences from Parsons to Kuhn* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

[3] Benedetto Croce famously denounced Paretian politics, but Croce had an interest in vilifying his contemporaries in order to be remembered as the main anti-fascist intellectual voice in Mussolini Italy. Benedetto Croce, "The Validity of Pareto's Theories," *The Saturday Review* (May 25th, 1935), 13. Outside of Italy, Karl Popper and Raymond Aron bear special responsibility for disseminating this view, though towards the end of his life Aron equivocated on the extent of Pareto's fascism. See Aron's letter to James Meisel, Meisel 1965, 42n166; For similar accusations, see R.V Worthington, "Pareto: The Karl Marx of Fascism," *Economic Forum* (Summer and Fall 1933); William McDougall, "Pareto as Psychologist," *Journal of Social Philosophy* I:1 (October 1935), 36n1; E. Faris, *The Nature of Human Nature and Other Essays in Human Psychology* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1956) Ch. 16; Melvin Rader, *No Compromise* (London: The MacMillan Company, 1939), 55-93; 198-201.

[4] Giorgio Volpe's recent analysis of both Mosca and Pareto centers around this purported fear of "mass society," which represents a culmination of the conventional wisdom on these figures to date. Giorgio Volpe, *We, The Elite* (New York: Routledge, forthcoming).

[5] Fanciful theories were developed to explain Pareto's sudden change of heart. For Franz Borkenau, Pareto's counterrevolutionary positions were the result of an oedipal complex. Franz Borkenau, *Pareto* (London: J. Wiley and Sons, 1936), 82-84. According to another view, Pareto's hatred of democracy can be explained by his being a "decayed nobleman," bitter about his failed parliamentary campaign. Werner Stark, *The Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1958), 53. For H. Stuart Hughes, Pareto's about-face represents his response to his failed predictions about protectionism. H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2004), 260-261. All such theories have been debunked by Samuel Finer, yet Finer still maintains that Pareto's change

In other words, the intellectual landscape drawn over the last century has rendered Pareto as a figure who was always deeply distrustful of the effects of mass participation; consequently, his shifting politics, it is claimed, were motivated by an effort to contain these tendencies in both the economic and political spheres (Bellamy 1990). In his youth, this fear expressed itself in a "libertarian" orientation against socialism, and in his later years it manifested conservative, "counterrevolutionary," or even proto-authoritarian antipathy toward democracy (Crillo 1983; Friedrich 1950, 265). Charles Merriam's critique of the "anti-democratic elitists" Mosca and Pareto devoted special attention to "the seemingly un-despotic liberal" Pareto who, in Merriam's estimation, "on closer inspection proved hostile to the very possibility of democratic self-government" (Merriam 1939, 29; 208-210).

This long-standing paradigm not only obscures Pareto's central preoccupations, but also the nature and function of his pessimism. Far from worrying about the pernicious effects of increased mass participation, I argue that Pareto anxiously feared elite corruption and its pernicious effects on a polity. Throughout his life, in both his journalistic and academic endeavors, Pareto sought to combat corruption by exposing the myths used to legitimate a decaying plutocratic ruling class.[6] In his own historical moment, this meant debunking the reigning myth that popular sovereignty can be expressed through parliamentary representation. Most crucially, Pareto aimed to reveal the

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was the response of a disappointed liberal whose disillusionment forced him to retreat from politics into academic life. Samuel Finer, "Pareto and Pluto-Democracy: The Retreat to the Galapagos," *American Political Science Review*, 62:2 (June 1968), 440-450.

[6] Some have acknowledged that like George Sorel, Pareto sought to dispel this political myth, but argue that without Sorel's proletarian bias, Pareto's exposure acquires an anti-democratic quality. Guy Perrin, "Thèmes pour une philosophie de l'histoire dans le Traité de sociologie generale," *Cahiers Vilfredo Pareto* I (Geneva: Droz, 1963), 36-7.

plutocratic stranglehold of political life that electoral institutions engender, and he unfailingly warned of the dangers that could result from this kind of corruption.

As opposed to understanding Pareto in relation to the fervent classical liberalism of the Anglo-American tradition or the counterrevolutionary fervor that swept over *continental* Europe in response to the uprisings of 1848, the following discussion analyzes his political thought within the context of the Risorgimento. Studying Pareto with an eye to the distinctly Italian, "skeptical" orientation toward liberalism in the midst of state unification unearths entirely different preoccupations than the ones typically emphasized (Femia 2006, 6). More than anything else, Pareto warned against the exploitation that structurally accompanies electoral forms of government, the risks of intensified economic inequality, and how these two factors generate a governing class that transcends the strict category of politicians who, in representative systems, are supposed to be accountable to popular sentiments and desires. Not only does such a reconsideration render the classification of Pareto as a laissez-faire liberal or proto-fascist authoritarian inappropriate, but it also accentuates the anti-elitist (rather than the anti-popular) continuity in his pre- and post-1899 political concerns.

Instead of interpreting his pessimism as an expression of disdain for illusory faith in the progressive prospects of mass political participation, I contend that Pareto's deployment of pessimism seeks to combat the plutocratic risks associated with electoral government by ruthlessly exposing them. While many would later read his aggressive cynicism as a disbelief in popular government of any kind, in some contexts and intellectual traditions, Pareto's angry, rebuking tone functions as a potentially productive posture, at least from a democratic perspective, in that it militates against equating democracy with elections.

In his appraisal of the Italian economist, Joseph Schumpeter insists that Pareto's scientific contributions must be understood biographically, for "the whole man and all the forces that

conditioned him entered so unmistakably that it is more necessary than it usually is…to convey the idea of that man and of those forces" (Schumpeter [1951] 2010, 113). This chapter thus begins with a biographically anchored investigation of Pareto's early writings to reveal his core concerns with economic inequality and elite corruption under electoral schemes. Given this context, the theory of equilibrium and elite circulation, I then argue, directs readers to the perils of liberalism by focusing on the relationship between competitive minority elites in a given society, or polyarchy, rather than acquiescing to the inevitability of elite rule. By way of conclusion I take up Pareto's purportedly most "proto-fascist" text, *Trasformazione della Democrazia*, which studies how electoralism hampers democracy and prophesies the authoritarianism that looms after the imminent collapse of parliamentarism.

The Fiery Revolutionary: 1848 – 1899

From his earliest days, Pareto exhibited passion for the public policies that would make Italian unification a success. Until he was fifty, he fought tirelessly against the Italian ruling class by illuminating the dynamic between elite sects in the nascent parliamentary state, and the many ways electoral corruption facilitated the ability of these minorities to despoil the polity despite their best intentions. Unlike British or continental contemporaries like John Stuart Mill or Condorcet, Pareto understood parliamentarism not as a regime based on openness and discussion, but rather one premised on the primacy of the electoral mechanism.

Pareto was the son of the Genoese Marchese Raffaele Pareto, an uncompromising Mazzini supporter who was exiled to Paris as a result of his revolutionary fervor.[7] It was there, in 1848, that

[7] Despite his father's title, Pareto's family was not wealthy, and he grew up in middle-class conditions. Pareto achieved financial independence only after he became heir to his uncle's sizable fortune in 1898, an inheritance which permitted him to live comfortably as an academic.

Pareto was born, but at age ten he returned to Italy and began the typical course of studies that resulted in an engineering doctorate in 1869. Thereafter, he embarked upon a career in industrial management, rising to the ranks of the managing director, as it were, of the Società delle Ferriere Italiane. After struggling to navigate the "deal-cutting" with government departments that influential deputies and London bankers required to raise capital necessary to modernize at competitive prices, Pareto resigned his post in 1884.[8]

This is not to say that Pareto became politically inclined only after his career in industrial management. As early as 1870, the year of the formal completion of unification, Pareto lectured political economy on the side, regularly wrote editorials on the policies of the day, and ran an [unsuccessful] bid for office on a highly "anti-elitist" platform in 1881 (Powers 1984, 9). After resigning from la Società, he published a plethora of "anti-establishment" articles and organized radical democratic meetings which marked Pareto as a wanted man by the Italian police.[9] He supported the popular insurrections of 1894 and 1898. In 1898-1899, he sheltered Italian socialist refugees after the government had opened fire on peaceful protests in Sicily, and during that year he continued to encourage a coalition of republican, socialist and democratic activists against government corruption (Pareto 1989a, 222).[10]

[8] Pareto to Maffeo Pantaleoni, October 28, 1896 in Pareto 1960 and Giovanni Busino, "Introduzione a Vilfredo Pareto" in *Vilfredo Pareto: L'uomo e Lo Scienziato*, ed. Gavino Manca (Milano: Libri Schwieller, 2002), 21.

[9] Pareto published primarily in the *Giornale degli Economisti* under the editorship of his friend Maffeo Pantaleoni but ceased contributing in 1898 after friction developed with the new editor Antonio De Viti De Marco due to the excessively anti-establishment tone which, in De Viti De Marco's opinion, characterized Pareto's contributions. Pareto to Maffeo Pantaleoni, June 14 and August 1, 1897 in Pareto 1960.

[10] Pareto to Luigi Minuti, January 24, 1894.

One might think that seeing his dream of the Risorgimento come to fruition, under the structure of a parliamentary regime no less, would have been a cause for optimism. Yet Pareto saw no reason to celebrate the triumph of liberalism in Italy. He identified nothing but incompetence and corruption in the new Mecca and fought mercilessly against each administration. Outside of Italy, he gained a reputation as an ultra-laissez-faire liberal partially because of the ferocity with which he repudiated government intervention as nothing more than the craven workings of politicians' machinations against the public interest (Busino 2002, 23).

Analysis of his early thought, however, reveals that Pareto's orientation should not be classified under the liberalism of the English variety—the "Manchester" type or otherwise.[11] Pareto railed against government, not because he was against government activity per se, but rather because he was against the governments of parliamentary rule—the same parliamentary governments that English liberals held so dear. In comparison to its English or French counterparts, the Italian establishment, he maintained, was a sordid caricature of the worst vices of electoral politics.

For Pareto, Italy's difficulties were the product of collusion among politicians, speculators and military leaders who, despite misaligned interests, managed to steer the government toward their own pecuniary advantage. Under electoral governments, he says, "the subtle ways in which the politicians manage to purloin the wealth of the nation and to divide it up among their friends" are so complex and opaque that they can easily go undetected (Pareto 1892a, 419-420). His relentless exposes of these maneuverings, or *combinazioni*, can be loosely organized within his critique of the Italian economic crisis, financial scandals, and military expansion.

[11] Richard Bellamy demonstrates the ways in which Pareto followed John Stuart Mill, but also notes that some of Pareto's conclusions have more in common with T.H Green's "new liberalism" than strict "classical liberalism." Richard Bellamy, *Modern Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), 15.

Pareto belabouredly argued that the economic crisis resulted entirely from a party system that encouraged and rewarded collusion. The country's dire financial straits could be explained by three factors. First, no matter which party came into power, each cabinet promised to increase armament expenditure without tax hikes in order to appease the military (Pareto 1890a). At first, Pareto held out hope that eventually some administration would have the courage to take a "firm grip on those untouchable institutions which are the ministry of war and the admiralty," but it quickly became clear to him that Antonio Starabba di Rudini's accommodating attitude toward the military was just as bad as Francesco Crispi's, and that Giovanni Giolitti's blithe spending in this regard was "even worse" (Pareto 2001).[12]

Second, each government seemed beholden to a class of financial operators and speculators. In 1892, commenting on rumors concerning the possible sale of the railways, Pareto proclaimed the sale price of 600-700 million lire to be "ridiculously low" in light of the 60 million lire that the state was receiving per year from the sector (Pareto 1892c, 59). In effect, politicians were giving away one of Italy's major going concerns for pennies to the already well-to-do. Despite Giolitti's proclamations that privatization would enrich public coffers, Pareto countered that this simply could not be the case at such a low valuation. Perhaps every enterprise has a price, he concedes, but the only effective way to balance the budget would be to reduce public spending "starting with military expenditure" (Pareto 1892c, 590).

Finally, Pareto contends that the crisis could be traced back to protectionism: new tariffs had exacerbated the trade deficit (increasing the value of imports and decreasing that of exports) because they had unexpectedly increased production costs (Pareto 1891b, 390). Yet his campaign against

[12] Pareto to Teodoro Moneta, May 15, 1892.

tariffs was not resolutely anti-protectionist: Pareto's diatribe was specifically directed against Italian duties, imposed primarily on agriculture (specifically on grain), which disproportionately disadvantaged the southern region. The way to solve the southern question, and, incidentally, "protect" southerners from starving, he claims, was not to make it more expensive for the *Mezzogiorno* to export their agricultural products (Pareto 1892b). No one on the global market will buy southern goods at those prices, he warns, and the region will become even more impoverished: emigration will rise, bank deposits will fall, and unification will be threatened by aggravating the already precarious economic disparity between the North and South (Pareto 1891b, 390).

Pareto's anti-protectionist crusade thus unsettles the typical assumptions of classical liberals. Anti-customs policies in Italy were not affiliated with the liberal, moderate or nationalist parties, but rather championed by socialists, and in fact, the young "liberal" Pareto vocally advanced the proposal of socialist Gregorio Aginin to abolish the duty on grain (Pareto 1892b). But irrespective of the political labels that anti-protectionist policies assumed in Italy, Pareto was never an anti-protectionist *tout court*. In certain stages of development, he argues, government subventions and protective tariffs are positively conducive to industrial growth since they afford time for the necessary capital accumulation that enables national industry to compete in world markets. While tariffs entail a significant transfer of wealth, he accepts that such transfers can be beneficial in the long run depending on the circumstances of the tariff in question and its beneficiaries.[13] In this

[13] "…mathematical economics supplied a proof that, in general, the direct effect of protection is a destruction of wealth. If one were to go on and add an axiom, which is implicitly taken for granted by many economists, that any destruction of wealth is an 'evil', one could logically conclude that protection is an 'evil'. But before such a proposition can be granted the indirect economic effects…of protection have to be known…we find that protection transfers a certain amount of wealth from a part, A, of the population a part B, through the destruction of a certain amount of wealth, q, the amount representing the costs of the operation. If, as a result of this new distribution of wealth, the production of wealth…increases by a quantity greater than q, the operation is economically beneficial. [This]… case is not to be barred a priori" (Pareto 1935, §220).

circumstance, tariffs on agriculture only benefit the North: such duties would exacerbate the disparity between the Northern "haves" and the Southern "have-nots," and justifiably render *meridionali* more suspicious of whether unification had just transferred the exploitative power of the Bourbon monarchs to the capitalistically sympathetic House of Savoy.

Protectionism was not the only issue which differentiated Pareto's position from the free-trade platform of traditional economic liberalism. In the sphere of monetary policy, he vehemently opposed fiat currency and free issuance of bank notes. "For all intents and purposes," the issuing of paper money unbacked by coinage, he insists, constitutes "a tax" on the working population because increasing "the spread vis-à-vis gold" decreased the value of the lira, thereby reducing the purchasing power of those receiving "fixed salaries" (Pareto 1892b). The "most important thing," Pareto writes, "is that notes should be convertible into coinage…"(Pareto 1892b). Although he knew quite well that free-trading economists of the time "hope to see freedom of issuance," non-obligation to accept banknotes for coinage was also "compatible with *a regime characterized by a monopoly of issuance*," and such a [Northern] monopoly, he says, would be destructive given the rampant inequality between *settentrionali* and *meridionali* (Pareto 1960, 329 *emphasis added*).[14]

Put simply, in order to improve this regional economic disparity and the country's general economic situation, the best policy would 1) reduce the issue of notes so as to eliminate the premium on gold and 2) require that all banks carry enough coinage to back paper money. While in theory enacting this policy would not be difficult, Pareto recognizes that it requires "politicians to stop drawing on the deposits of the issuing banks for their own needs"—an event that did not seem likely in light of their previous record (Pareto 1892b).

[14] Pareto to Pantaleoni, December 20, 1892. The point was reiterated in an address given by Pareto in Milan on December 16, 1892, *Corriere della Sera*, December 18-19, 1892 and Pareto 1897 §5120.

Pareto's monetary policy effectively accused politicians of drawing on public reserves at the expense of the working class. But his analysis of the question vis-a-vis issuing banks also cast light on the collusion *between* political and economic elites. The Banca Romana's financial scandals constitute one among many sensational examples of such *combinazioni*.[15] Pareto began monitoring the issue in 1891, when he first observed that, at the prompting of the Banca Nazionale (one of the six issuing banks), the government had created the Istituto di Credito Fondiario (Real Estate Credit Institute or Land Credit Union). Immediately he noted that the institute had a number of problematic real estate loans on its balance sheet (Pareto 1891c).

Two years before the Banca Romana scandal erupted, Pareto clamored about the canary in the coalmine. The creation of this land credit union, he writes, represents a nexus between banking elites and real-estate tycoons, along with the politicians who cave to their demands in exchange for kickbacks. The union will never achieve anything in the interests of the nation because the whole aim of the venture, he asserts, was "to come to the aid of compromised building companies and to clear the portfolios of the banks which had propped them up thus far" (Pareto 1891d).

For Pareto this episode demonstrated that even the Rudini-Luzzatti administration, despite their "vague intentions of honesty and integrity…will submit to any type of coordinated pressure" exerted by economic elites seeking to financially engineer organs of profit, not by providing real value, but through government bailouts (Pareto 1891d). And indeed, the Istituto di Credito Fondario was quickly rescued by the Bank of Italy. Here he laments that no matter which party holds power,

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[15] In short, this period is marked by episodes in which financial elites bribed politicians in order to allow them to benefit from further bond issues. The worst part, for Pareto, was that the show trials cleared politicians of responsibility and allowed the company administrators to circumvent their terms of imprisonment (Pareto 1894b, 130). For a brief overview of the scandals, see Christopher Seton Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism, 1870-1925* (London: Methuen, 1967).

differences in competence, intentions, or platform cannot stop elected representatives, supposedly only accountable to the people, from catering to leaders of the finance and banking sectors. Even without formally electing economic elites to office, Pareto intimates that consolidation of a plutocracy in Italy is near.

Over the course of the 1890's, Pareto fought against fiat currency based on the corruption that electoral institutions engender. In his view, when issuing banks were not required to redeem paper notes with sound money to average citizens, the banks could mobilize capital and deposits in unprofitable transactions designed solely to the advantage of the government and private financial institutions. The banks had allocated the savings entrusted to them, he says, "among various entrepreneurs…[not] according to [their] productivity in a fair manner…[but] according to the kickbacks the entrepreneurs were able or prepared to *pay the politicians*, which is not at all the same thing" (Pareto 1897, §482n1, *emphasis added*).

The legal tender regime had thus helped enact a system of legalized bribery masquerading as responsive government: banks had been relieved of the obligation to redeem their notes with sound money, and legislative controls were ineffective since both political and economic elites stood to profit from fiat currency (Pareto 1893b). The only way to ensure that banks exchanged their notes, Pareto writes, was to give citizens the right to "take legal action against them, exactly as for a trader or a banker who does not redeem a bill of exchange at the due date" (Pareto 1893h). Perhaps other nations could reap the benefits that fiat currency allows in facilitating capital accumulation, but Italy could not bear the risk given such egregious displays of parliamentary corruption.

To be clear, the problem was not simply corruption given the short-sighted nature of certain selfish politicians. To Pareto's mind, the electoral system created a *classe dirigente* or *classe governante*, a ruling or governing class, that transcended political leadership to include military and economic elites, but which could not hold the latter two groups accountable. Pareto's pacifist writings against

the First World War best reveal how the plutocratic "connection" between political, military, and economic sects defies the idea that elections can make this broader ruling class responsible to the majority of the people.

In the summer of 1892, Pareto began to attack the Triple Alliance as "a catastrophe worse than any in historic memory" (Pareto 2001).[16] "What benefit can come for the Italian people from the government's support for Germany in regard to the possession of Alsace-Lorraine?" he asks in one letter (Pareto 1960, 388).[17] This alliance was capable of "obliging Italy to take part in a war which is none of its business and which could cost much more than just vast sums of money, because [if] we win we will gain but little reward, while [if] defeated we will be destroyed" (Pareto 1892d, 543). There must be another reason, he muses, that the Italian establishment was eager to destroy "the whole of Europe so that Germany can keep control of Alsace-Lorraine against the wishes of its inhabitants" (Pareto 2001).[18] Delusions of national grandeur could not even explain this policy of "plain stupidity" (Pareto 1960, 250).[19] There must be more to it.

Pareto encouraged his readers to think about who might economically benefit from war. Certain capitalist interests in the North, he intimates, would obviously like to have a paying customer for armament production.[20] But a military-industrial complex could not be the whole reason, either. In 1893, Pareto suggested that ruling class corruption was behind both the war effort

[16] Pareto to Moneta, July 11, 1891.

[17] Pareto to Pantaleoni, July 29, 1893.

[18] Pareto to Moneta, October 18, 1891.

[19] Pareto to Moneta, October 18, 1891.

[20] Pareto to Pantaleoni, July 20, 1892. Later Pareto expressed his conviction that war is "the consequence of the rivalry between political classes, who wish to increase the number of their subjects, and, more particularly, of their taxpayers (Pareto 1897).

and the new protectionist policies. The government, he says, facilitated a trade: parliament granted tariffs to economic elites desirous of increasing the prices of their products in exchange for their support for desired armament expenditure designed to satisfy the military (Pareto 1989a, 165).[21] Parliament had acted as a clearing house to satisfy economic and military interests, presumably only to line the pockets of representatives.

Clearly politicians were responding to economic and military elite demands, Pareto says, and not enacting policy in the people's interest. He thus proposes one hardly classical liberal but "infallible way" to render Italy "more pacifist than Switzerland": finance the proposed military expenditure "through additional taxes on landholdings" because the culpable elites in this circumstance are more likely to own property.[22] Instead, Pareto demonstrates that the military budget had been financed through a system of indirect taxation which made the loopholes it created for the ruling class difficult to detect, and which burdened the popular classes without benefiting them at all (Pareto 1893f). There is a reason, he says, that the nation, as a collectivity, was never asked to decide among possible strategies for balancing the budget—i.e. through debt, reduction of military expenditure or tax increases (Pareto 1895a). Direct consultation of the people, our supposed "elite theorist" intimates, would have resulted in a more just and sounder outcome.

Pareto began to clamor for democratic action. Only "true" democratic regimes, and not the shams known as "parliamentary democracy," could forestall the threat of war because parliamentarians were enabling interested parties to control policy (Pareto 1893f). At the end of 1895, speaking of the Italian defeat at Amba Alagi, he encouraged Italians to use the Ethiopians as a

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[21] Pareto to Cavallotti, August 14, 1892.

[22] Pareto to Papafava, August 14, 1892 in Pareto 1989a, 165-166. Pareto defended the view proposed in Tibero Squilletta's "La Nazione armata. Studio di un nuovo ordinamento dell'esercito," *Giornale degli Economisti*, III, V-3 (1892) 183–221: III, V-4: 344–375; III, V-5: 428–478.

model: "instead of going to fight the Africans… the Italians should fight their internal enemies"—the politicians who are working for other elites. The working classes are far more cognizant that the "millions…wasted fruitlessly in Africa would be better spent in Sardinia, in the Roman countryside, where there are lands to be reclaimed and roads to be built everywhere" (Pareto 1983d). Since "the art of governing consists in plundering citizens' property, rather than safeguarding it, and the goal is for all the politicians to receive their share," the only way for Italians to "defend their land and their liberty," he proclaims, is to collectively fight against the political class in an anti-war campaign.[23]

No matter the policy in question at this stage in his career, Pareto seeks to expose the corruption of a *classe dirigente* that transcends the political sphere. This ruling class, he often claims, should be understood as a network with various nodes of patronage and influence. In the modern state, these nodes cluster around economic interest. While Pareto often called the governing class "the bourgeoisie," the derogatory label referred not to the middle classes, but rather to the "rich and well-to-do" ruling minorities who were not a part of the pre-1860 nobility.[24] To be sure, these new, querulous elite sects are constantly competing with one another, but there is still sufficient cohesion among them to warrant calling them a "class" because they live by political and economic mutual backscratching.

[23] Pareto to Emilia Peruzzi, December 18, 1892 in Pareto 1984a.

[24] "Whom do I call the bourgeoisie? I call bourgeois all those who live comfortably and enjoy protective tariffs, get government jobs for their children and make money through the contractors, and, when the occasion arises, plunder the banks; and besides these, many rich and well to do persons, honest in their private lives but who think it necessary, so as to support their own class and not dry up the sources of money for their friends, to support knavery on the government's part" Pareto to Maffeo Pantaleoni, December 23 1896. For Pareto's critique of the pre 1860 nobility, see his writings from the "Florentine period" (1874-1893), which are full of even more savage references to the "gilded youth" and the families who "'sucked the blood' of the Italian poor." Pareto to Pantaleoni, December 23, 1896 in Pareto 1960.

In his early years, Pareto wrathfully hurled vitriolic attacks on Italian politicians who were "not only dishonest but also incompetent, ignorant, dithering and lacking in determination" such that "everything they try ends up going wrong" (Pareto 1893d). But at this time his view of *structural* electoral corruption in parliamentary governments was already forming. *La classe governante* does not consist only of politicians, but rather of a consortium of sects (*consorterie*) who live by taking in each other's washing without explicit design or intention. At the most general level, the class was increasingly splitting "into two distinct groups," he explains, consisting of those who were in explicit pursuit of power and those, much more numerous, who had "nothing in mind but making money" (Pareto 1893e). Although this second category relinquishes formal political power to those who procure money for them, he asserts, the political "industry [was becoming] more lucrative" for all parties concerned (Pareto 1893e).

Even when confining his discussion to *la classe politica*, for Pareto competitive elections never reflect anything about the people's choice of leadership. In his eyes, politicians were united in a medieval fraternity with the parliamentarians at the top followed by the influential electors economically incentivized to campaign for them. The parliamentarians and secondary level officials work by exchanging offices in return for votes (Pareto 1892f, 50). As a result, the candidates with the best ministerial contacts are elected, and not those who received anything that could be interpreted as a popular mandate. Electoral outcomes, he states, bear no "inference as to the political views that prevail around the country" (Pareto 1892e, 62). Worse still, this did not mean that an administration with enough secondary level ministerial power would remain there for long periods, since these sub-deputies will at a whim switch their allegiance to another politician able to promise greater handouts (Pareto 1892e, 62).

Part of the issue lies in the particularities of Italian parliamentarism. No matter what they may claim about their "parliamentary democracies," Pareto contends that other European states do

not concentrate as much power in their legislatures. In contrast, the Risorgimento had imposed a Bismarckian system of authority on an English parliamentary monarchy in the context of a French centralization of state: "Nothing good was to be expected from such a monstrous assemblage" given that "a well-established tenet of political science is that one of the worst forms of government is a parliamentary dictatorship which has control of centralized powers" (Pareto 1891e, 2). By over-empowering electoral institutions, Italian unification brought out the ugliest side of representative regimes.[25]

Nevertheless, after having expounded at length on Italian electoral corruption, Pareto also asserted that all representative systems exhibit these features. The lack of genuine political parties and universal corruption were "the consequences of more general causes," he writes, in part typical of Latin countries, in part specific to Italy and in part common to "almost all civilized states" (Pareto 1893g, 710). At the University of Lausanne, Pareto would take on this larger project of analyzing "almost all civilized states" and theorize the same plutocratic problems within representative politics more systematically, albeit in a way seemingly abstracted from the context of modern Italy.

Professing Equilibrium: 1893 – 1916

Between 1893 and 1916, as the Walras chair of neoclassical economics at the University of Lausanne, Pareto published the academic volumes in which he developed his famed theories of equilibrium. These theories allegedly contain the germs of his proto-fascist thought, or at the very least, they supposedly attest to his elitist hatred of democracy because they divide society into a binary between a passive mass versus an active elite; by implication, it is believed that these texts

[25] Both Mosca and Pareto argue that extension of suffrage would not solve the structural plutocratic problems that electoral government pose.

demonstrate his disbelief in salutary mass agency because they insist on the inevitability of elite rule.[26] Rather than insist on the primacy of the mass/elite binary, I argue that Paretian equilibrium, and specifically, his theory of elite circulation, should be characterized instead by its focus on elite heterogeneity and on exposure of some of its various problematic combinations in a given society.

Before turning to his political thought, it is helpful to acknowledge why so many scholars interpret the works from this period as Pareto's pessimistic resignation over elite domination. His legacy is defined by his purported "elitism" for a few reasons. Most obviously, Pareto was the first to employ the term "elite" in a prominent fashion, and his French appellation, *élite*, enjoyed more success than Mosca's counterpart *la classe politica* or *la classe dirigente* among continental and Anglo-American audiences (Sereno 1938, 514, 515).[27] Moreover, Pareto's death in 1923 precluded the opportunity to distance himself from fascism that Mosca had been afforded; consequently, Pareto is often remembered as the more proto-fascist thinker of the pair. And, generally speaking, Pareto's aggressive rhetoric was easily misunderstood as exhibiting anti-democratic proclivities (Freund 1976, 1).

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[26] Tom Bottomore laments that Pareto did not appreciate the "heterogeneity of elites," even though Pareto often said that the unity of the ruling class was a Marxist fairy tale. Tom Bottomore, *Elites and Society* (Harmondsworth: Pelican Press, 1966), 12. For others, Pareto denies agency to anyone but elites, thereby dividing society between elites and the masses (Peter Bachrach, *The Theory of Democratic Elitism: A Critique* (Washington DC: University of America Press, Inc. 1980). Some argue that Pareto's interest in crowd psychology confirms that the division of elites and masses characterizes his thinking. Robert Nye, *The Anti-Democratic Sources of Elite Theory* (London: Sage Publications, 1977). Others maintain that Pareto's division of human activity between the logical and non-logical not only divides society in two categories, but also legitimized authoritarian politics. Richard Bellamy, *Modern Italian Social Theory* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1987). Still others, albeit aware that Pareto's categories were complicated, nevertheless understood this paradigm as the crucial one. Warren Samuels, *Pareto on Policy* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1973 [2012]).

[27] For those interested in the feud between Mosca and Pareto, see Alfonso di Pietri-Tonelli "Mosca e Pareto," *Rivista internazionale di scienze sociali*, VI (July 1935), 468-493 and Renzo Sereno "Note on Gaetano Mosca" *The American Political Science Review* Vol. 46:2 (June 1952), 603-605.

More fundamentally, Pareto's economic studies demonstrate a consistent interest in economic inequality, and the elite/mass paradigm forms the guiding element of his equilibrium models. For example, the law of vital few, which showed that 80% of the land in Italy was owned by 20% of the population, seemed to suggest that nothing could change this inherent division between masses and elites (Pareto 1897). As Joseph Femia explains, "in his determination to 'unmask' the hypocritical elitism and tawdry self-seeking elites of liberal 'democracy', he was a match for any left-wing firebrand," but the problem lay in the finality of his economic laws (Femia 2006, 138). Of course, Pareto's economic work can be broadly characterized by the elite/mass partition, but myopic focus on these categories occlude the way that his critique of liberalism, as we will see, actually complicated them.

On the surface, his conception of social equilibrium did not appear encouraging, either. In contrast to authors who likened the social body to an organism, Pareto proposes a model of equilibrium, or a dynamic balance among interdependent parts constantly moving towards a stable state, as a heuristic for understanding a polity (Pareto 1935, §2060). According to this model, the form of society depends on the nature of the minority that dominates the rest of the populace, and regime change occurs when one set of elites replaces another decaying group in search of equilibrium—a theory he calls elite alternation or elite circulation.[28] By focusing on elite "heterogeneity," or the composition and fluctuations in membership of the dominant minority, Pareto sought to dispel the Marxist fairytale that there was unity in a singular, monolithic ruling class, one that would be overcome by the dictatorship of the proletariat (Heyl 1968).[29] In response to

[28] In his previous academic works, Pareto calls this movement the "alternation of elites," but in the *Trattato*, he collapses the terms elite circulation and elite alternation.

[29] For more on this point, see James Meisel, "A Question of Affinities: Pareto and Marx," *Cahiers Vilfredo Pareto*, V (1964), 154-63.

his repudiation of Marx, later commentators, as we shall see in Part II, interpreted this emphasis on equilibrium between different classes of elites as denoting either fatal resignation or celebration of elite rule.[30]

The aim of this sociological theory, however, was not to encourage quietist acceptance of domination, but rather to contest it by unveiling the dangers distinct elites pose and the fragility of a decaying governing class. In the *Trattato di Sociologia Generale* (1916), Pareto deploys elite circulation vis-à-vis the equilibrium model as a way to contrast two forms of polity that are particularly relevant given the corrupt practices of present ruling minorities. Each archetype corresponds to a distinct type of *classe dirigente* and their contrasting means of governance.

The first type, which Pareto does not formally name but censoriously refers to as "Byzantine," constitutes an autocratic state in which power is explicitly designated in a hierarchical, centralized structure (Pareto 1935, §888; 2586). These governments operate directly on the governed through the use of physical force and explicit coercion. This ruling class is replete with what Pareto earlier in the work calls "Class I residues," or the "persistence of aggregates" (§1015-1051). These residues, or instincts and abilities incline the state toward violence and direct reinforcement of authority through clearly "organized" bureaucracies (§2610). For the sake of simplicity, Pareto beckons his reader to use Machiavelli's labels and think of the elites who rely upon these attributes as "lions."

In this form of government, a rigidly defined, cohesive and clearly identifiable ruling class dominates. The sub-leadership directly responds to the elite minority, and all agency flows from the

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[30] Even outside of political science, for most economists and sociologists, Pareto's most "significant insight" lies in the view that "the history of all hitherto existing society is a history of social hierarchies." Joseph Persky, "Retrospectives: Pareto's Law*," The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 6:2 (Spring 1992), 181-192, 191.

top of the pyramidal structure. The Greek Tyrannies, Sparta, China, Medieval feudalism, the Reformation, and Ancien Régime are all classified under this typology (Pareto 1935, §2228; 2259; 2274; 2585).

The second type of government represents a de-centralized clientelist state. This regime disseminates power latently through various and even competing channels—channels operated indirectly through artifice and cunning. The power of this group emanates from a fluid consortium of patrons who dominate through "Class II residues," or the "instinct of combinations" (Pareto 1935, §889). The shrewd ability to combine (*combinare*) allows for those in power to constantly create new coalitions of dependents through manipulation and intrigue, and these coalitions are always actuated by economic interest. In keeping with Machiavellian categories, Pareto calls this ruling group the "foxes" (§2268).[31]

Pareto does not bestow a formal title on this secondary typology, but its "plutocratic" form corresponds with the government of Athens, Republican Rome, medieval municipal structure, Venice, Italian parliamentarism, and all forms of modern electoralism (Pareto 1935, §1744-1745; 1801, 2256). Employing twentieth century political science vocabulary, Samuel Finer defines this form of administration as a "polyarchy" because a plurality of minority elite groups compete for power (Finer 1975, 165). Giovanni Sartori agrees on the polyarchic, pluralist nature of Pareto's second type because the ruling class consists of many "leading minorities" (Sartori 1962, 131). Three elements of this typology are of particular mention, as they showcase the continuity with Pareto's diagnosis of the Italian parliamentary system.

[31] For a recent revival of Pareto's fox and lion metaphors in his explanation of social change, see Clayton Fordahl, "Lions and Foxes: Revisiting Pareto's bestiary for the age of late pluto-democracy" in *Distinktion: Journal of Social Theory* (April 15, 2020).

First, while the ruling minority should be considered a *consortoria* of competing sects, they develop cohesion through economic incentivization, rendering monetary compensation a primary component of this regime. This form can flourish so long as it generates more wealth than it reallocates through patronage (Pareto 1935, §2304-2307; 2257; 2267). The Roman Republic and modern liberal, representative governments are the best examples of this system because electing a legislature necessarily requires the formation of "cliques, intrigue, and gangs" beyond the political class, Pareto says, and economic rewards are the only incentive strong enough to draw such disparate parties together (§2259; 2257n1). Plutocratic power thus constitutes a necessary feature of this state.[32]

Second, the cohesion generated through economic backscratching does not come about by a specific plot or conspiracy. Pareto denies that the governing class is a "concrete unity" or a "person" (Pareto 1935, §2255). Its principal characteristic, he asserts, is "the order, or system, not the conscious will of individuals who may, indeed, in many cases, be carried by the system to points they never would have gone to by deliberate choice. The road...followed...is the resultant of an infinity of minor actions" (§2254; see also §1577). Even the most earnest opponents of the plutocratic state act as its unintentional purveyors. To take case of the United States as an example, both Woodrow Wilson and William Jennings Bryan, he maintains, "went into power as professed and probably sincere opponents of trust and financiers, but actually they worked in their favor in maintaining anarchy in Mexico with a view to securing a President there who would be subservient to American

[32] "Polybius (*Historiae*, VI, 17, 1-4) notes, in particular, manipulations of public contracts by censors, especially the farming of taxes, and he remarks that virtually everybody was engaged in it. 'Some,' he says, 'get the contracts from the censors themselves, others are bondsmen, others mortgage their properties as bonds.' There, in its cradle, is the creature that will one day be named Plutocracy. An infant weakling, it remains subordinate. Once it gets and grows its muscle, it will claim dominion" (Pareto 1935, §2548).

finance" (§2256). Put differently, because all actors are highly motivated by pecuniary interest, they act in concert without any need for shared intention or preconceived design.

And lastly, although a variety of distinct sects form a broad-based ruling group without explicit mutual objective, they are made all the more cohesive as a result of the "inner government"—a political cabinet—which facilitates the concerted action of the competing minorities (Pareto 1935, §2225; 2265). Elected assemblies function as a go-between for the various nodes of power and influence.[33] Importantly, according to Pareto, this political form does not impinge upon minority domination by allowing for competition between a plurality of distinctive minorities; rather, it facilitates such domination by acting as a legitimating façade that veils the inordinate power the other, competing elite minorities hold over the formal political entity.

Although he harbors contempt for the Byzantine state, Pareto spends little time developing the typology because it does not correspond to the current, dominant form of polity. In his own time, the second genus of electoral or "democratic" rule prevails, but at a moment when it begins to show signs of decay. Though he includes so-called "democratic" states in this category, he distinguishes between democracy and what everyone calls "democracy" but which really denotes representative government. "The best government now in existence, and also better than countless others that have so far been observable in history," he clarifies, "is the government of Switzerland, especially in the form it takes in the small cantons—forms of direct democracy" (Pareto 1935, §2240). This democracy, he continues, "has nothing but the name in common with the governments, also *called* democratic, of other countries such as France or the United States" (§2240n1, *emphasis added*).

[33] "Sometimes, Pareto says, politicians will cave to public sentiments, but only when they are forced to pay "ransom…for lucrative operations conducted by shrewd financiers, promoters, and other speculators," (Pareto 1935, § 2253n1).

One might wonder why Pareto does not more forcefully distinguish between representative rule and democracy as he understands it. If he defines democracy as the devolved government and participatory politics of the Swiss cantons, why include "democracies," always in quotation marks, in the second category at all?

A major component of Pareto's argument emphasizes the problems with contemporary representative regimes that tout themselves as democratic. He constantly distinguishes between democracy as a form of government and democracy "as a religious creed" (Pareto 1935, §933-936; 967-970; 1220-1228; 1511-1514; 1312; 1859). Pareto goes to strenuous lengths to elucidate why electoral government cannot be faithfully understood as synonymous with a popular one. In a word, in these electorally based regimes the informal constellation of power bypasses the official circuits of representation, which poses systematic disadvantages to the majority of the people (§1486-1492). This virtually disqualifies liberal representative government as a necessarily popular form in the democratic register.

This issue does not merely epitomize an example of benign hypocrisy in modern political discourse. The "fiction of popular representation," or the myth that elections generate democratic accountability through representative delegation, Pareto argues, bears pernicious, concrete consequences for the health of the polity (Pareto 1935, §2244). He makes sure to include so-called electoral "democracies" of his day, the ones that supposedly construct adequate avenues of popular participation and accountability, in order to underscore that the conceit of democratic representation actually creates disillusionment with the system, thereby encouraging the waning of its legitimacy.

Given the stark failures of electoral outcomes to reflect popular interests, Pareto contends that the conflation of election and "democracy" does not mollify the people into believing that elections produce accountability of leadership to the majority. Parliamentary "democracy," he suggests, only generates democratic expectations that electoral institutions will always undermine.

This gap between the expectations and the political reality of representative politics makes space for a cunning "demagogic plutocrat," "a wealthy financier who becomes a demagogue for the sake of political influence rather than from any real conviction," and who exploits the inadequacy of elections, consequently ushering in a new stage of authoritarian rule (Pareto 1935, §2256n1). In other epochs, this demagogic plutocrat came in the form of a Crassus, a Caesar, or even a Napoleon III, but Pareto fears that a contemporary manifestation will be far worse than the ones previously experienced given the recombinatory possibilities contained within a capitalistic and liberal regime (Pareto 1935, §2584; 2583; 2582n2).

To recapitulate, the elite circulation model contends that regime change occurs when one ruling class replaces another group whose power has begun to decay. As the reigning political arrangement in his day, Pareto highlights the ways that pluralist or polyarchic, electorally based systems create channels of plutocratic domination through the economic cohesion of highly diverse, competing minorities. In their current manifestation as "parliamentary democracies," the expectations for this class of leadership contrast sharply with their behavior, precipitating the disintegration of their authority and presenting a plutocratic demagogue with the opportunity to initiate a regime alteration towards autocracy.

Pareto never hides his frustration with his own typologies. He admits that his binary of the two regimes is inadequate because many governments do not fit in either category, as the clientelist practices of feudalism demonstrate (Pareto 1935, §2259). Additionally, he identifies far more "residues" than the relevant two described above (there are six in his schema); therefore, infinite combinations of these human tendencies will never generate a "perfect repetition of political structures in history" (§888; Pareto 1999, 41). Nevertheless, for the purposes of understanding social change from the perspective of equilibrium, these impoverished categories help capture his main aim: to identify a perceptible "undulation" or "alternation" between the Byzantine, "centripetal"

accumulation of power and the "centrifugal" dispersion of power in the polyarchic form (§2541). In the most abstract sense, the history of civilization ping-pongs between these extremities, and equilibrium analysis seeks to understand the reasons for such vacillation and isolate moments of transition.

For some, this "undulating curve" between the pair of elite types may seem excessively narrow and undifferentiated.[34] Yet it would also be a mistake to classify his theory of social change as a constant, abrupt transition between the two poles of centripetal and centrifugal domination. While Pareto stresses that all ruling classes are eventually replaced, one variable can mitigate violent transitions and the worst excesses of each form of government: In order to inhibit the stark oscillations between these two types of power, a ruling class must continually check itself by remaining open to contestation from below. Elite circulation within a ruling class determines the moments of transition between government alternation because it keeps the minority more responsive to the majority. How each *classe governante* maintains an open "aristocracy" (also always in quotation marks) and fights the pitfalls of its own corruption depends on the society in question.[35] The fourth volume of the *Trattato* devotes hundreds of pages to analyzing the countless permutations this "openness" or "closedness" can take. Most obviously, Pareto claims, democratic contestation from below allows for a natural flow of equilibrium. In fact, when classes in a nation are suddenly allowed to "mingle," or

[34] Many commentators in the postwar period held that this element of Pareto's thought epitomizes his conservatism because it denies human progress. See, for example, Morris Ginsberg, "The sociology of Pareto," *The Sociological Review*, 28:3 (July 1936), 221-245.

[35] Pareto makes clear that those occupying elite positions are not necessarily the most qualified or the genuine aristoi (Pareto 1935, §2035-36).

> when class-circulation that has been sluggish suddenly acquires an intensity at all considerable, almost always observable is an appreciable increase in intellectual, economic, and political prosperity in the country in question. And that is why periods of transition from oligarchic to more or less democratic regimes are often periods of prosperity (Pareto 1935, §2485).

Examples of such democratic contestation and consequent prosperity include "Athens in the time of Pericles, republican Rome after the victories of the plebs, France after the Revolution of '89. But one could go on" (§2485). Elite groups that remain genuinely open to lower-class influx are the best off, Pareto states, as they will most assuredly enjoy periods of "boom" (§2485).

Along with democratic contestation from below, Pareto argues that cooptation of competent lower-class members into the ruling class and policing of corruption among elites can be just as important to the maintenance of equilibrium. In fact, Venice and Sparta began with open ruling classes, and that while neither were ever really accessible to the lower elements, throughout most of their histories the governments compensated for their narrowness through constant "egress," or expelling their most corrupt members (Pareto 1935, §2494; 2501). Once Sparta became a fully closed system, he writes, the revolt of Agis was on the horizon (§2494). Counterintuitively, Pareto uses the examples of Venice and Sparta to stress that the constant influx of new members from lower classes and constant expulsion of corrupt elites—and not simply rotation between elite types—undercuts corruption and helps maintain social equilibrium by preventing radical oscillations.

At some points, Pareto makes the critical purchase of elite circulation and the equilibrium heuristic explicit. "Our democracies in France, Italy, England, and the United States are tending more and more to become demagogic plutocracies," and he predicts that they "may be following that road on the way to one of those radical transformations that have been witnessed in the past" (Pareto 1935, §2257). But in his mammoth study of nearly all civilizations, the argument about

plutocratic corruption in his own purported "democratic" moment can get lost. Perhaps for this reason, many have interpreted the rambling tangents on plutocracy and obscure tirades on the specificities of Italian parliamentarism as a product of his disorganized writing style (Coser 1971, 421).

But in these very tirades and tangents lie the heart of his message: the plutocratic ruling class of his own day has decayed to such an extent that it is on the verge of combustion. If social equilibrium is to be maintained—that is, if the plutocratic ruling classes do not somehow find a way to restrain their own corruption by becoming more open to membership from the lower strata and disciplining their most corrupt members—the current reign of so-called "parliamentary democracies" will give way to the violent form of autocratic rule.[36] Far from constituting an about-face in his anti-elitist orientation, the focus on elite heterogeneity in equilibrium displays his continued effort to fight the plutocratic tendencies of liberal regimes by warning of future authoritarianism.

I have focused on Pareto's analysis in the *Trattato* because it constitutes the culmination of his political theory from his years in the academy. But well before its publication, in the review of his Paris course (1896-7), "Sunto di alcuni capitoli di un nuovo trattato di economia pura," (1900), *Les Systèmes Socialistes* (1902), and *Manuale d' Economia Politica* (1909), Pareto analyzed elite heterogeneity and circulation to advance a rebuke to his readers.[37] Throughout these works, he cautions that pluralism within the ruling class does not necessarily make a system more stable or democratic.

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[36] This contention is a stable theme in Italian political thought. For the way that Francesco Guicciardini anticipates this argument, see John Padgett, "Open Elite? Social Mobility, Marriage, and Family in Florence, 1282–1494," *Renaissance Quarterly* 63:2 (Summer 2010), 357 – 411.

[37] I exclude *Cours d' Économie politique* from consideration because there is nothing specifically Paretian about this work. The text constitutes Pareto's attempt to make good on his appointment as the Walras neoclassical chair. Pareto refused to sanction a reprint or a second edition, and I accordingly take his lead on which texts best exemplify the particularity of his contribution.

Furthermore, the seeming global success of "parliamentary democracy," he contends, should not fool anyone into thinking that its "pluto-demagogic" features will inhibit its coming demise. When viewed in this light, even the most "scientific" explications of the dynamics of equilibrium acquire a political valence. As Pareto describes in the opening pages of *Les Systèmes Socialistes*, the height of a movement indicates an impending swing in achieving equilibrium:

> When a movement is about to change direction, the reversal will not usually start with a decrease in intensity, which would facilitate predication; on the contrary, the movement will attain its maximum intensity precisely at the moment prior to the change of general direction (Pareto 1902, 22).

If it is indeed the case that Pareto's political message becomes lost in the million-word, disordered magnum opus, then, fortunately for us, in his last work he indicates exactly how he wants equilibrium theory to be interpreted vis-à-vis the governments of his own day.

A Furious Invective: 1919-1921

To be sure, Pareto's pessimistic tone in *Trasformazione della Democrazia* (1921) manifests its most hostile expression. But rather than representing the pinnacle of his "fascist" thought, this harsh rhetoric insists on the separation of election and democracy in order to forestall the latter's violent collapse. In so doing, his angry pessimism offers a severe denunciation of current ruling elites and simultaneously articulates his most distilled warning of the authoritarianism that contemporary plutocratic corruption breeds.

The book's title, "The Transformation of Democracy," indicates the chief motivation of this short political treatise: how do representative institutions transform democracy into a demagogic plutocracy? From the outset, Pareto admits that he harbors significant reservations about using the word "democracy" because of the general confusion it provokes over, on the one hand, democracy

understood as a specific regime type and, on the other, the many arrangements that might make up "popular government" (Pareto 1999, 39). Henry Sumner Maine, he remarks, may think that he resolves the confusion posed by the comprehensive idea of democracy by replacing it with "popular government," yet both terms inadequately capture the "indeterminate" nature of this "fugitive" concept—one that evades precise specification of institutional requirements (39).

The difficulty is further compounded by the narrow scope of Pareto's argument. His text, he reminds the reader, studies the "transformation," or "social movement," of popular government into a structure that has nothing to do with democracy itself (Pareto 1999, 39). Pareto yearns to understand how a seemingly legitimate democratic form so often mutates into its very opposite (40). While the *Trattato* demonstrates that all bodies politic undergo alteration, democracy presents an especially acute illustration of a polity that constantly threatens to undermine itself in a way that fully inverts itself. Deconstructing the nature of this particular type of political change, he says, better elucidates "the economic, political, and social consequences" of the "current phenomenon" (51; 83-4). From these introductory remarks, Pareto makes clear that he does not think that democracy properly conceived as the direct, mass participation of the Swiss cantons, for instance, poses a problem per se. Rather, his mission consists in uncovering how representative institutions can transform popular governance into an undemocratic regime.

Since he has "already been accused" of making certain "dangerous" normative judgments that he rejects, Pareto begins by qualifying his project (Pareto 1999, 44). Many, he complains, have interpreted his previous works as condoning or celebrating the consequences he identifies (44). But if he chooses to detail precisely how the current bourgeois ruling class "runs to its ruin," this does not mean that he encourages them towards that end, nor does it mean that he "advocates particular reforms of customs, prejudices, laws, or behavior to preclude from such a destiny" (44). That idea would suggest that he can offer some "prescription for curing the sickness from which the

bourgeoisie suffers" (44). On the contrary, he declares, "I am completely ignorant of the remedy" (44). Think of me, he says, as a "doctor who knows exactly how to diagnose the patient with tuberculosis but has no idea how to cure him" (44).

Pareto even admits that a remedy would be far more valuable than what his treatise contributes: merely a close investigation of "the type of political transformation we are witnessing" (*la trasformazione alla quale assistiamo*) and a prediction of some of the resulting consequences (Pareto 1999, 47). In order to understand the current type of social movement, he applies the equilibrium analysis employed in the *Trattato* to investigate why contemporary representative governments so often threaten to become demagogic plutocracies (47).[38]

To make a long story short, Pareto says, two contrasting forces exist in every society: the centripetal force, which concentrates power in a central authority, and the centrifugal force, the one that pushes towards diversification (Pareto 1999, 55). These two energies vacillate in search of equilibrium in an infinitely "undulating curve" (56). The diametrically opposed poles attract individuals with different aptitudes for acquiring power: the centripetal force draws those who incline toward direct expression of aggression and the centrifugal attracts those with a predilection for indirect manipulation.[39]

One or the other of these groups gain control over the state only because the "weaker," more numerous parts of the population seek protection from domination exercised by one of these

[38] Pareto intended to add another volume to the *Trattato* which would have examined contemporary events in light of his theories. However, he never finished this volume, and *Fatti e Teorie* (1920) and *Trasformazione della Democrazia* (1921) were written in its stead, initially appearing as a series of articles for the *Rivista di Milano* in 1920. Francesco Marchiano in Vilfredo Pareto, *Trasformazione della Democrazia* ed. Francesco Marchiano (Roma: Castelvecchi, 2016), 5.

[39] In *Fatti e Teorie*, written contemporaneously with *Trasformazione della Democrazia*, Pareto claims that this division is analogous to Machaivelli's theory of the two humors presented in the *Discourses on Livy*, and that investigating this division constitutes the guiding thread of all his work (Pareto 1920, 321).

two forces (Pareto 1935, §2180; Pareto 1999, 63). At present, Pareto states that the weaker classes are dominated by a *classe governante* which exhibits centrifugal, diversifying instincts; nevertheless, their sovereignty is clearly "crumbling" (*sgretolamento della sovranità*) due to the "discord sown by their excessive greed (*eccesiva cupidigia*) and their commitment to a war that formally summoned a demagogic plutocracy" (64). These circumstances threaten to "force the weak to prefer a centripetal, centralized government which will concentrate sovereignty in itself" (*volgono a favorire questo secondo periodo, un governo centrale persistente…torna a concentrate in sé la sovranità*) in opposition to the foxes who currently despoil them (55; 63).

Given *la classe dirigente's* ostentatious corruption, who can blame them? For too long, Pareto says, the legitimating justification of their power has proven to be a myth—a "derivation"—that no one could conceivably accept, least of all those who need protection from abuses of power (Pareto 1935, §868; Pareto 1999, 41). "The theory that our Parliaments reflect the nation through representation," he repeats in this last essay, "is simply a fiction" (Pareto 1920, 76). In reality, "our parliaments only represent the sovereign group that [currently] rules through their vulpine arts," a fact which is obvious to everyone except for the delusional *classe governante* itself (76). Pareto furiously scolds the ruling group for deluding itself into thinking it would actually benefit from its "insane and suicidal politics" of deceit and corruption perpetuated throughout the war (76). For some reason, he says, they believe that they retain popular support because they recite the canticle of representation, making chimerical promises without any intention of keeping them (Pareto 1999, 64). No ruling group, he implies, can get away with this type of leadership for long.

Here again, Pareto accentuates problems associated with the myth that representation facilitates popular sovereignty, and consequently, democracy. He claims that the plutocratic dimension of parliamentary politics eradicates representation's seemingly democratic pretensions.

Invoking "the maxim which represents the origin of our parliamentary governments"—no taxation without representation—he writes:

> It used to be maintained that taxes must be approved by those who pay them. Today, whether we acknowledge it implicitly or explicitly, the opposite holds: those who evade their tributes approve and impose them on the rest" of the population (Pareto 1999, 76).[40]

The "weaker," urban "working classes" (*operai*) may have no means available to fight the current Svengali's evasion, he continues, but they are certainly not blind to it (81). No wonder the *operai* are "exasperated": We cannot be surprised that they would invite demagogic leaders to gain footing, he suggests, whether that invitation takes the form of suspicious Trade Union tyrants pretending to champion the cause of the proletariat or a more potent and visible figure who will eventually overtake the entire polity (81).

At first, representative governments foster plutocracy due to the failures of electoral accountability. As the plutocrats grow in number, Pareto recounts, their corrupt *combinazioni* proliferate, and their power gives way to demagogic energies that become increasingly appealing to oppressed classes (*quando prevale il primo termine della plutocrazia demagogica, sia col numero, quando il secondo termine si vigorisce*, Pareto 1999, 76; 85-6). This process constitutes "the plutocratic cycle" of electoral governments (55; 112).[41] While the shrewd foxes champion representation in order to legitimate their power, the collapse of their sovereignty in so-called contemporary "democratic" states in fact

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[40] Jeffrey Winter demonstrates that even in Sweden the superrich set the taxes paid by the rich. Jeffrey Winter, *Oligarchy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 279. For a similar analysis along these lines, see Jeffrey Green, *In the Shadow of Unfairness: A Plebian Theory of Liberal Democracy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[41] For an analysis of the way that Machiavelli anticipates this argument, see John P. McCormick, "Machiavelli's Greek Tyrant as Republican Reformer," in *The Radical Machiavelli: Politics, Philosophy, and Language*, ed. Filippo Del Lucchese, Fabio Frosini, and Vittorio Morfino (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 337-48.

unravels through the exposure of the myth of representation as blatant hypocrisy. This means that the equation of election and democracy is actually harmful for the resilience of elections, as the ever more apparent incompatibility of election and democracy proves to be a powerful delegitimizing force.

Through the mythical conflation of representation and democracy, parliamentary government thus effectively functions as plutocracy's "handmaiden," and Pareto denounces these regimes as "the effective instrument" of "demagogic plutocracy" because electoral institutions, or their manifest democratic insufficiency, can encourage demagogues to take control of the state (Pareto 1999, 83-4). But crucially, demagogic plutocracy should not be considered a genus of the Byzantine, centripetal form of organization. It functions as an intermediary stage between the two government types.[42] For Pareto, demagogic plutocracy denotes a system in which representative institutions allow plutocrats—that is, "rich speculators" (industrialists, merchants, financial operators, etc.)—to con the "democracy of workers" into joining a "partial alliance" with them against landowners and farmers (or rentiers), "thereby pulling the wool over [the worker's] eyes," albeit temporarily (83-4). With a demagogue at its helm, this liminal state sanctions the ruling class to continue substituting real economic production with risky speculation and "fiscal tricks" (76). While of course the demagogue claims to be fighting for the downtrodden proletariat, "in reality he defends those who know how to pillage them" (104). Remember, he insists, the demagogue himself is one of the plutocrats.

Pareto's substantive claims clearly remain consistent between the *Trattato* and *Trasformazione*, but the latter book's aggressive condemnation of ruling elites intensifies a few aspects of his

[42] "Consequently, modern parliamentary regimes follow the rhythms of all plutocracies: They prosper and decline, and their transformations, also called transformations of democracy, accompany the typical occurrences evident in all plutocracies" (Pareto 1999, 83-4).

previous thought—an intensification which, we will see, was later met with serious disapprobation by critics. First, as just mentioned, Pareto's social classification defies the simple elite/mass paradigm that his legacy attributes to him; it identifies more nuanced categories to describe the ways that parliamentary systems afford speculators the "upper hand over the state and of exploiting other social classes" (Pareto 1999, 83-4). His laborious distinctions between speculators and rentiers in *Trasformazione* recall his discussion on the subject in the *Trattato*, in which he complains that the Marxist division between capitalists and proletariat is not sufficiently differentiated because it does not adequately capture the picture of domination as currently experienced by majorities (Pareto 1935, §2231-2239). In both works, he states that without singling out the "speculating" sect of the capitalist set, Marxist categories occlude the threatening elements of the ruling group that allies itself with the urban proletariat against rural farmers (rentiers), even though the latter two share more of the same interests, and, generally speaking, speculators and workers (*lavoratori*) *never* share any common interests (Pareto 1999, 83).[43] In *Trasformazione* he further accentuates the division between urban and rural workers and between financial operators and capitalists who engage in less speculative economic activity. Far from reinforcing the ruler versus ruled binary that preoccupies the cannon of western political science, Pareto emphasizes the importance of detailing elite differentiation in order to identify the specific threats posed to the polity by each part of the ruling class.

Second, for Pareto, this attention to elite heterogeneity illustrates that parliamentarism constitutes an inherently unstable cum undemocratic system because it systematically engenders plutocracy (Pareto 1999, 93-4). In keeping with all of his works, he insists in *Trasformazione* that the

[43] For the famous elaboration of the same argument applied to the particularities of the Italian context, see Antonio Gramsci, "The Conflict between City and Countryside in Modern Italy" in *Italy from the Risorgimento to Fascism*, ed. William Salomone (New York: Anchor Books, 1970), 397-412.

"recombinatory" quality of electoral regimes structurally breeds plutocracy, in modern and ancient popular governments alike: "there is nothing in the present state of affairs to prevent the plutocrats from continuing to make fat profits, just as the general prosperity of the Roman plutocracy was in no way jeopardized by the corn doles" (95-6). Capitalism's acute "recombinatory" quality, he maintains, simply makes contemporary matters far worse (Pareto 1935).

In *Trasformazione*, Pareto demonizes plutocracy, anthropomorphizing it to such an extreme that it becomes the greatest nemesis of political life per se. Plutocracy's instrumentalization of parliamentary government is the most insidious problem that we face, he writes, because it creates room for the "devious" measures that speculators use to dupe the masses (*per scopo principale di trarre in inganno le moltitudini*, Pareto 1999, 91). It is striking, given retrospective charges of elitism, that his analysis does not impute to the masses an inherent cognitive incapacity for participating in politics; rather he stresses protracted, deliberate efforts on the part of speculators to "gull" the lower classes *and* everyone else outside of the speculating class into supporting their own self-interested ends—a vulnerable group that includes the "investors and savers" who are presumably elites themselves (91).[44] For Pareto, the speculators that reign through modern representative governments are the perpetrators of injustice; he warns that if parliamentary institutions remain unreformed, there will be no remedy for the impending political tragedy (91-93).

The tragic, yet imminent "triumph" of demagogic plutocracy thus becomes far more pronounced in this final essay (Pareto 1999, 91). "Plutocracy is weakening, and demagogy is growing stronger," Pareto cautions, because "a downturn in the cycle is on its way" (91). Representative institutions have encouraged demagogues to enter the public sphere, he repeats in the conclusion,

[44] "From that standpoint," Pareto writes, "the interpretations of plain people are generally of greater importance than the interpretations of the scholar" (Pareto 1935, §260n202).

which is the reason electoral governments so often allow for the transformation of a popular government into a regime diametrically opposed to it. In this respect, his pessimistic despair should not be reads as a call for resignation; rather, his bellicose admonition functions as an exhortation for all representative regimes that do not restrain plutocratic power to quickly do so.

Trasformazione makes the case against the plutocratic features inherent in all representative systems, but Pareto never stops privileging the Italian case. In the appendix, he returns full circle to attacks on the Giolitti administration that preoccupied him in his early years and declares that his predictions have been vindicated. The "legal conspiracy among plutocrats" has become undeniable (Pareto 1999, 109). He accuses the plutocratic ruling class of attempting to lower the exchange rate and cause a currency devaluation in order to hide the schemes that made them billions during the war (109). The evidence, he writes, "reveals that a number of stockbrokers are at fault," as can be seen by their panicked sale of nine million lire in state bonds in the span of a mere two days (109-110). Although the usual "judicial inquiries will continue," he says, the investigations conducted in Turin and Milan already indicate that they will have "the life expectancy of soap bubbles" (110).

At this point, Giolitti's denunciations of the perpetrators of injustice strike everyone, including Pareto, as a cruel joke. Calls for "democratic" accountability will not do because the political representatives allowed those who stood to profit from the war to control policy (Pareto 1999, 111). New impositions of sumptuary laws cannot hide the fact that "demagogic plutocracy in Italy and elsewhere was only able to support the war by [ruling class] deceit." (Pareto 1999, 112). The duplicity began when those who supported the war—those that stood to materially prosper from it—were able to steer the government into deceiving the Italians into believing that the war would be "short, inexpensive, and require no tax levies on them" (112). "Had it been otherwise," had those "profiteering sharks" and even those "honest producers" not been able to exercise so

much influence over the government, he claims, "the war would have never lasted," and things would have been different (112).

Although "now there is some pretense of prosecuting some of those sharks," Pareto laments that "no one questioned their actions during the war" (Pareto 1999, 76). In microcosm, this belated attempt to sanctimoniously preach "democratic" values (*Per compiere tale miracolo…talcuni si affidano…alla santa Democrazia*) illustrates how electoralism creates a plutocracy which inhibits popular government: Giolitti, Pareto says, will now make "impossible" promises to the people of "increased prosperity of the masses" in order to win votes, but he will engineer this façade of affluence by allowing the same plutocrats to stimulate production through "innumerable fiscal tricks and whimsical measures designed to manipulate the economy…" (113). These lies, he cries, "belong to the same class of falsehood and deception politicians used to manipulate public opinion during the war and continue to use now that peace is here" (113). The plutocratic electoral cycle thus endures, but at a certain point, he warns, the majority will refuse to support a hypocritical system which only intervenes on behalf of "the downtrodden" and ends the "evil deeds it previously favored" when it can do nothing else (114). Pareto now worries that it might already be "too late" (114).

"When the state stops being for everyone—that is to say, when it stops being a *res pubblica*," Pareto writes, "it inclines each day towards a part of the populace" (Pareto 1999, 104). Elections privilege the speculating part of the population, he reiterates time and again, thereby obstructing the democracy that parliamentarism claims to have enacted. Most obviously, Pareto aimed to dismantle plutocracy by identifying the destructive effects of electoral corruption on the *res pubblica*. But just as importantly, he underscores the threats inherent in the mythical or "fictitious" conflation of democracy and electoral government. In so doing, he shows his readers how their behavior poses a threat to their own dominance. Pareto may insist that he has no remedy to offer the ruling class of

his day, but his heated reprimand functions as a warning, as it were, of the current ruling classes' political suicide pact. If anything, his angry condemnation should only encourage them to reform.[45]

The Italian Pareto: Responding to Anger

After reading Pareto's livid tirade against modern liberal, representative governments, one might be tempted to think that he rejects electoral institutions altogether, and by implication, condones the force and violence characteristic of the Byzantine state.[46] Even those who acknowledge that Pareto was "the prophet, not the apostle of Fascism" tend to think that his political thought encourages proto-authoritarian conclusions because he speaks so disparagingly of Italian electoral institutions (Bousquet 1960, 193-4n4). This assumption, combined with Pareto's diatribe against corruption between financial and political elites, has prompted scholars to believe that "if Pareto's theory had not existed, Fascism would have had to invent it" (Lyttleton 1973, 22).

If one starts from the perspective of the continental European experience with revolutions—that is, from the view that a critique of elections necessarily constitutes a counterrevolutionary attack on democracy, then Pareto will of course sound like a proto-fascist who hates popular participation. Even though Pareto expressed anger towards the plutocratic ruling class of his day and the ways representative institutions were used to the plutocrat's advantage, he never gives us any reason to think that elections, in and of themselves, constitute the main difficulty facing

[45] We may disagree about the implications of Pareto's critique of parliamentary government, but Giuseppe La Ferla is correct to note that although Pareto insisted that he had "a fixed idea not to believe in ethics…there is nobody who does not feel that a high moral conscience inspires the whole of the work" of this apparently cynical and a cold man. Giuseppe La Ferla, *Vilfredo Pareto, filosofo volteriano* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1954), 166.

[46] Pareto went out of his way to demonstrate that violence was not a substitute for "manipulation" and *combinazioni* (Pareto 1935, §2205).

modern governments. In his eyes, the problem surfaces when elections are privileged and inaccurately presumed to be the democratic institution par excellence. When this conflation occurs, it becomes difficult to restrain the structural plutocratic tendencies of electoral procedures; under the halo of democracy, the intellectual justification for such a critique appears to vanish.

Pareto's political thought teaches us that the mere presence of competitive and fair elections will not create a democratic government. Elections, he insists, often obscure the ways in which unaccountable sects of competing elites can sway the legislature to act against the public interest. His contribution alerts readers to the risks of papering over different types of elites in a given society; he demonstrates that ignoring the plutocratic dimension of representation will only facilitate corruption of the system and undermine its credibility, thereby transforming a democracy into an autocracy.

Relatedly, approaching Pareto's political thought from the perspective of Anglo-American liberalism—an approach which often treats democracy and representative government as inextricably linked—also prompts one to ignore his warning of plutocracy. It encourages the belief that he aimed only to condemn political elites, and not a broader ruling class that escaped the channels of majoritarian accountability that representative mechanisms are often presumed to provide. This results in the fallacious assumption that he abhorred government intervention as a rule, or that he became so disillusioned with his initial commitment to liberalism that he bitterly reacted against it in an excessively anti-democratic fashion.

Understandably, both continental and Anglo-American scholars seek to understand Pareto's thought within their own political contexts and assimilate him into their own respective traditions. But Pareto was primarily concerned with Italian political life during a time, Schumpeter writes, when "the frosts had not yet fallen upon a theoretical structure glorified by uncritical liberalism" (Schumpeter 2003 [1951], 114). From the perspective of an Italian steeped in the plutocratic horrors of the Risorgimento, an angry critique of liberalism, electoral institutions, or representative

government and its plutocratic dimensions does not necessarily constitute an attack on a popular form of government.[47] In fact, only from our own peculiar contemporary standpoint does a critique of electoral government so often read as a denunciation of mass participation or of democracy broadly conceived. This explains why Pareto's life and works, at least when considered from the Italian vantage point, do not display a continuous series of performative contradictions or dramatic expressions of grand disillusionment with liberal democracy.

The Italian orientation towards politics is one characterized by incessant exposure of corruption as a means of combatting its most deleterious effects. In a cultural milieu that identifies political activism with constant critique of plutocratic elites, Pareto's "fiery pen" strikes the reader neither as anti-democratic nor classically liberal in the English sense.[48] In this regard, his reception among his Italian contemporaries may be illuminating. As Vittorio Racca recounts in his retelling of the popular insurrection of 1898, Pareto was at the time considered the obvious champion of the people, and, on a moment's notice, the Sicilian activists knew where to turn when the government violently arrested peaceful protestors simply demanding bread:

> Why did everyone retreat to Pareto's home in Lausanne? Because he was considered the fiercest, most courageous defenders of the people's rights, of the people despoiled and oppressed *by the myopia and greed of the rich classes*. He was the greatest flagellator of those classes and their antiliberal policies which destroyed the well-being of the people in the new

[47] Many commentators believe that thanks to his mother's French birth, more abstract, economic perspective, and secluded life in Lausanne, Pareto was less enmeshed in the particularities of Italian Parliamentarism than Mosca, who only experienced the Italian context and served a long career as a public servant and a senator. See, for example, H. Stuart Hughes, "Gaetano Mosca and the Political Lessons of History," in *Teachers of History: Essays in Honor of Lawrence Bradford Packard*, ed. H. Stuart Hughes (Ithaca, New York: 1954), 146-67; 147-150. I hope that this reconsideration of his thought puts this assumption to question.

[48] Vittorio Racca, "Working with Pareto," (July 2, 1928) Livingston Papers, Box 7, Folder 13, Harry Ransom Center. The University of Texas at Austin. My translation.

Italy. These people had the right to see another type of politics after their revolution had ran their [initial] enemies out of Italy through national unification.[49]

[49] "…questi profughi, che a volte avevano dovuto scappare alla spicciolata e senza una camicia da cambiarsi o denari in tasca, come se si fossero dati la parola d'ordine, confluirono quasi tutti a Losanna e andarono da Pareto. Perché'? Perché' egli era stato uno dei più fieri e coraggiosi assertori dei diritti del popolo italiano sfruttato e oppresso dalle classi ricche, miopi e ingorde, il più; grande flagellatore della politica antiliberale e distruggitrice del benessere che quelle classi imponevano all'Italia nuova, che aveva diritto di vedere ben altra linea di condotta seguita dopo la sua rivoluzione cacciata del nemico e l'unificazione nazionale." Racca 1928, 1 my translation, *emphasis added.*

CHAPTER TWO

SOBER CYNICISM
Mosca and The Ruling Class

In order for everything to remain the same,
everything much change.

— Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, *Il Gattopardo*

Throughout his life, Pareto vehemently insisted that his anti-elitist posture did not make him a socialist. As a self-professed contrarian, he refused to bow down to any "ism" whatsoever, but "the main reason" why he was not a socialist was that he could not see "a way to increase state control without increasing the damage produced by politicians" (Pareto 1975, 185–186).[1] And yet despite his infamous critiques of their economic theory in *Les Systèmes Socialistes* and his refusal to identify with the movement, Pareto was thoroughly enmeshed in socialist discourse.[2]

As we saw in the last chapter, not only did Pareto champion Italian socialist policies, but he also encouraged a coalition of republicans and socialists against the liberal government and gave popular protestors and socialist intellectuals asylum in his home"[3] H alsoe rendered a very great contribution to socialist doctrine when he became the patron saint of "New Welfare Economics":

[1] Pareto to Colajanni, April 27, 1892.

[2] Fiorenzo Mornati has recently published a detailed discussion of Pareto's relationship and contacts within the Italian socialist party. Fiorenzo Mornati, *Vilfredo Pareto: An intellectual biography. Volume I, From science to liberty (1848–1891)* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 163-166.

[3] At the time of the first popular uprising in 1892, Pareto informed his American audience that socialism in Italy was far more complicated than its prevailing exponent in the United States. Socialist thought might prove disastrous from an economic perspective, he writes in *Political Science Quarterly*, but positive in light of its contribution to Italian political theory (Pareto 1893g).

Pareto was the first to demonstrate that a collectivist state may improve the level of welfare in a way practically unattainable under perfect competition—a hardly laissez-faire position which proves that his economic theory did not conform to ideological boundaries. He often sparred with his friends Antonio Labriola and Filippo Turati in Marxist debates and during his life he was considered a part of this intellectual community, especially in light of his open hostility toward the fascist "lunatics" epitomized by Giovanni Gentile.[4]

Far more than Pareto, Gaetano Mosca is remembered in light of his antagonistic relationship to socialism.[5] According to most studies, in contrast to Pareto's respect for Marx, Mosca's detached demeanor could not hide the fact that he "abhorred" Marxist doctrine and dedicated his life to combatting its tenets even if his tone "approached the notion of class conflict gingerly."[6] He sought to undermine socialism, it is argued, by developing a study of politics that was based on a "new science" characteristic of the positivist theories of his time.[7] Despite the fact that Mosca's tone of "urbane skepticism" was pierced with "ebullient Mediterranean good humor," his political thought

[4] Pareto to Pantaleoni, 269- 270. For Pareto's discussions with Labriola on the labor theory of value, see Pareto, "Proemio," *Biblioteca di storia economica* (Milano, 1903), IV-XIV in Pareto 1966, 304.

[5] As Jan-Werner Müller has pointed out, arguably nowhere else did socialist and communist discourse "flourish for such a long time both as a party and as a form political theorizing that had gained significant distance from Marx, but not necessarily broken with Leninism or, generally, an insurrectionary approach to politics." Jan-Werner Müller "The Paradoxes of Post-War Italian Political Thought" in *History of European Ideas*, 39:1(2013).

[6] James Meisel, *Pareto & Mosca*, ed. James Meisel (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), 10.

[7] Even those who acknowledge Mosca's insistence upon a historical method underscore that his type of criticism "is evidently strictly inductive and hence comparable to the empirical method of the natural sciences." Franco Ferrarotti, "Sociology in Italy: Problems and Perspectives" in Becker and Boskoff, *Modern Sociological Theory in Continuity and Change* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Inc., 1957), 702-707; 705.

is often described as "conservative" nineteenth century "positivist theory with vengeance" against socialist hegemony in political discourse.[8]

This chapter offers a reconsideration of Mosca against the backdrop of his relationship to socialist philosophy. Instead of undermining the Marxist progressive conception of class struggle in order to encourage resignation to elite rule, I argue that Mosca's critique of socialism and his famous ruling class theory were driven by the desire to expose the prevalence of elite rule in modern popular governments in order to better circumscribe oligarchic power and stem the growth of plutocracy. Mosca harbored a pessimistic disposition toward both socialist and liberal forms of electoral politics, but I demonstrate that this orientation was not motivated by an essentially elitist, anti-popular orientation. Rather, Mosca was principally concerned by the way that, through a democratic veneer, the plutocratic parliamentary institutions established in the Risorgimento would propagate similar structures of minority domination existing before Italian unification. The following discussion therefore briefly identifies some of his major political preoccupations and methodological attitudes that have been forgotten, ignored, or inaccurately interpreted as exhibiting necessarily anti-democratic proclivities.

In order to unearth Mosca's consistent focus on the plutocratic character of parliamentary government, this analysis compares his two main works, *Teorica dei governi e governo parlamentare* (1886) and *Elementi di Scienza Politica* (1939), contextualizing their methodology, evolution and reception in early twentieth century Italy. Once Mosca's concern with plutocracy comes into view, it becomes easier to understand the ruling class theory for what it really is: a heuristic device that endorses a defensive posture against the constant encroachment of elite power—a posture which, in his own

[8] H. Stuart Hughes, "Gaetano Mosca and the Political Lessons of History," in *Teachers of History: Essays in Honor of Lawrence Bradford Packard*, ed. H. Stuart Hughes (Ithaca: New York, 1954), 144; 148.

time, Mosca thought could guard against the anti-democratic propensities of electoral regimes, but also one which could be useful in combatting corruption and oligarchic domination writ large.

The Young Mosca: Teorica dei governi e governo parlamentare

Mosca's demeanor represents a quintessential expression of southern Italian pessimism, an attitude which worries that revolutions are facades intended to restore power to an existing elite or entrench it with a new one.[9] Taken holistically, his thought centers around dismantling what he considered dangerously optimistic political paradigms that would only lead to violent insurrection without any resolution or substantive change.[10] Whether they were of the positivist or Marxist variety, Mosca articulates suspicion toward optimistic, nineteenth century conceptions of progress, a distrust particularly motivated by the way that these paradigms discount the prevalence of plutocracy in modern parliamentary government. As the precursor to *Elementi di Scienza Politica*, Mosca's first book *Teorica dei governi e governo parlamentare* (1884) exhibits in microcosm the main ideas that will be later developed in his magnum opus: 1) an insistence upon a historical approach to political science, 2) a concern with the parliamentary-plutocratic nexus evident in liberal governments, and 3) an explanation of the political function of his pessimistic orientation.

Appreciating Mosca's account of positivism puts his cynical appraisal of Marxism into proper perspective, and additionally accentuates the contrast between his historical methodology and

[9] *Meridionale* (southern) political thought maintains a distinct place in the Italian philosophical tradition. For a comprehensive study of this pessimistic orientation, see Eugenio Garin, *History of Italian Philosophy*, ed. Giorgio Pinton (New York: Rodopi), 2008.

[10] For a discussion of this theme as it applied to the Risorgimento, see Massimo Salvadori, *Il mito del buongoverno, La questione meridionale dal Cavour a Gramsc*i, 2nd edition (Turin: Einaudi, 1963).

the "empirical," proto-behavioralist reputation he will later acquire.[11] It is indeed the case that Mosca complained that the study of politics desperately lagged behind the natural sciences.[12] In the opening pages of the *Teorica*, he calls for a "new science" to be developed so that the study of human affairs can be analyzed more "systematically" (Mosca 1982, 198). This call for scientific systematicity has led many to believe that he shared the typical, nineteenth century positivist craving to create a category of "social sciences" analogous to the natural sciences. Afterall, what could a "new science" possibly refer to if not the continental positivist philosophy characteristic of the German and French traditions prevalent at the time?

Nevertheless, Mosca's complaint was decidedly anti-positivist in the traditional understanding of the term because the study of "physics, chemistry, geology, botany, etc." and the study of "human affairs," he says, are incommensurable (Mosca 1982, 199). To uncover generalizable laws in the former, observation of present phenomena can suffice, but the "social sciences" require a vast historical record difficult to attain and nearly impossible to master (199). Moreover, while the natural sciences allow for experiments that can be purposively constructed and executed within a discrete time span, he contends that political experiments cannot be erected along the same temporal criteria or according to the same inductive reasoning (199).

Given this incommensurability, studying politics requires a global historical approach more akin to the intersection between what today we call philosophy of history and historicism. Mosca's

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[11] Mosca, Pareto, Michels and Schumpeter are remembered as proffering scientifically oriented, positivist conceptions of politics which will serve as the foundation for the behavioral revolution of American political science and the development of rational choice theory. See, for example, Michael Christensen, "Science Meets Politics with Mosca, Pareto, Michels, and Schumpeter," *Journal of Classical Sociology* (June 2013) or Jason Maloy, "A Genealogy of Rational Choice: Rationalism, Elitism, and Democracy," in *Canadian Journal of Political Science* Vol. 41:3 (September 2008).

[12] Gaetano Mosca, *Teorica dei governi e governo parlamentare*, ed. Giorgio Sola, Vol. I (Torino: Utet, 1982), 198. All translations are my own.

"social science" of the future in no way seeks to imitate the scientific method characteristic of the natural sciences. Instead, he calls for a "systematic" historical investigation of human affairs in the style of Giambattista Vico's "*scienza nuova*" or "new science" —a methodology antithetical to linear paradigms of evolution in the teleological tradition of Auguste Comte or Charles Darwin (Mosca 1982, 200).[13] By invoking Vico, Mosca argues that optimistic, Cartesian insistence on observable phenomena and verification cannot provide the foundation for social science research because it evades the often imperceptible but recurring ideas and structures which underpin civil life and/or civilizations (200).[14]

Mosca concedes that it may seem tedious to demand a global historical comparison between the governments of "Ancient Greece, Ancient Rome, the Middle Ages, and the Imperial orders of China, Japan and India" in order to uncover the particularities of contemporary parliamentary government (*governo parlamentare*) (Mosca 1982, 202-3). But he defends this comprehensive approach as essential for any "real and true social science" because no one in the present can recognize the "absurdities" of her own epoch without the distance rigorous historical comparison provides (201).

After *Teorica's* exhaustive study of each of these civilizations, Mosca discloses what he thinks constitutes the greatest absurdity of modern liberal polities: the problem contained in "the social question" (Mosca 1982, 517). He devises an anti-Aristotelean "political law" which divides society

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[13] In *A Short History of Political Philosophy*, Mosca elaborates Vico's new science and offers a treatment of his fellow Risorgimento patriots (Cuoco, Gioberti, Balbo and Romagnosi), who attempted to translate Vico's "fantastic presentment of the science he proposed" into a more accessible scientific formula. Gaetano Mosca, *A Short History of Political Philosophy*, trans. Sondra Koff (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1972), 160-161; 193-211 and Bruno Brunello, *Il pensiero da Romagnosi al Croce* (Bologna: Zuffi, 1949), 9.

[14] Rocco Rubini interprets the so-called Italian hermeneutic "difference" as a reception of Vico's thought against the Cartesian strains of continental philosophy (French, German, and their American elaborations). Rocco Rubini's *The Other Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

between rulers and ruled (as opposed to division between rule by the one, few and many) in order to call attention to the plutocratic challenge facing parliamentary government.[15] Unlike Pareto, Mosca does not explicitly identify this issue as plutocracy, but he defines the social question as the problems contained within a regime type characterized by "economic inequality, or the suffering of the poor by the excessive luxury and arrogance of the rich" (519). This question has attracted "thinkers of all ages," he says, but the concern remains dormant in our own political self-understanding (519).

In Mosca's view, the heart of the matter lies in the enormous inequalities in political control that arise from the wealth disparities inherent in parliamentary government (Mosca 1982, 520-528). He rejects the two prevailing and, to his mind, overly optimistic dispositions towards this issue. First, Mosca parsimoniously dismisses the Marxist fairy tale that economic inequalities could be entirely abolished (*interamente sparire*) in a communist future (519). This sort of utopian confidence, he writes, has already proven to cause great destruction without any indication that such an order could ever be stabilized (519-520).

More pressingly, Mosca claims, the preposterously sanguine liberal contention that economic inequality is the natural consequence of free competition has generated equal *if not greater oppression* (522; 523). Liberals maintain that government neutrality ensures free competition; however, he counters, that so-called "government neutrality" between economic classes actually constitutes a defense of the rich and a guarantee that wealth accrues in their hands:

> While soldiers' bayonets maintain order and secure peace, they actually prevent the poor from using their numerical advantage and protect the wealth of the rich, such that the rich are left free to combat the poor with their vastly superior economic means. In these

[15] The best treatment of Mosca's anti-Aristotelianism remains Renzo Sereno's "The Anti-Aristotelianism of Gaetano Mosca and Its Fate," *Ethics*, XLVIII: 4 (July 1938).

> circumstances, the poor, as the weaker group, necessarily succumb. The government intervenes with all of its means, overwhelming the people's numerical strength. Subsequently, the government needn't do anything to keep the force of money from prevailing (Mosca 1982, 523).

Mosca here anticipates a criticism that becomes rather familiar later in the twentieth century, but not one which is ever associated with his thought: liberal regimes and the negative liberty they presuppose do not engender fair or free competition because government neutrality protects the status quo, thereby stacking the cards against the poor in favor of the rich. "This kind of so-called liberty is quite advantageous in the economic sector as well," he continues, "where it extends an open invitation to the economically strong to oppress the weak" (Mosca 1982, 523). Mosca consequently implores his reader to "admit" that the liberal state offers a "well-funded insurance policy" (*mutua assicurazione*) for the rich against the poor, and not a commitment to the ideals of equality before the law or justice (524). "I will leave it up to those with a heart and a conscience to determine whether this constitutes the alleged 'liberty' that defenders of modern-day popular government wish to uphold," he sarcastically declares (523).

But there is far more to his critique of negative liberty than a moral plea for justice or political equality. Mosca claims that exposing this impoverished conception of freedom underscores the structural plutocracy endemic in representative government and, consequently, directs us toward the problems that arise when democracy and election are equated. Modern electoral systems, he writes, must stop declaring that they "guide," tutor," "protect" or even "represent" the masses (Mosca 1982, 524). The blatant hypocrisy should encourage us to "renounce" such representative claims as the reigning "raison d'être" of the parliamentary form, he says, because nothing constructive vis-a-vis political stability nor the improvement of general welfare comes from such idealistic delusions (528nc).

Mosca further complains that defenders of liberalism express Panglossian faith that universal suffrage or other procedural mechanisms that accommodate greater popular participation will resolve the empty democratic promises of representative institutions (Mosca 1982, 527). *On their own*, he insists, these instruments cannot be effective without massive economic redistribution—especially given the current conditions of abject poverty, illiteracy, and mafia control rampant in the *Mezzogiorno* (527).[16] The character of representation, he argues, always propagates plutocracy because it effectively bars the working classes from being elected to the legislature, destroying the possibility of the assembly to genuinely reflect the demos' concerns *even if the entire population is enfranchised.*[17]

In other words, despite even the most seemingly democratic practices, elections create formal equality emptied of substantive content because they unofficially bar lower class access into the governing body. This informal prohibition manifests itself in more or less obvious ways. Most noticeably, "technical expertise and a high level of cultural attainment" are increasingly required in the modern globalized world, a trend which Mosca says naturally skews the body of the representatives towards wealthy sectors of the population (Mosca 1982, 528). The propensity towards specialization encourages parliament to be filled with technocrats alienated from the masses,

[16] As Richard Bellamy describes, Mosca grew up in a Sicily where less than democratic forms of persuasion were employed in the newly established electoral practices. In one history of the *Mezzogiorno*, an observer portrays the common practices: "Some short distance from the polling station the road was barred by a group of sinister figures. Here each voter as he approached was seized, thoroughly bastinadoed and forced to drink a huge glass of wine. There followed a thorough search of his person, after which the government candidate's voting slip was put into his hand and he was led or dragged to the ballot box, where the president took the slip from him and put it in." Norman Lexis, *The Honored Society* (London, 1964), 35, cited by Richard Bellamy, *Modern Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 36.

[17] Mosca is understood to hate democracy partially because of his initial opposition to the extension of universal suffrage in 1890's Italy. Space constrains prohibit adequate discussion of this here, but Mosca's original concern over the extension of the suffrage was connected with the way that the mafia in Sicily would further entrench plutocratic control of the *Mezzogirono* under the legitimating façade of leaders elected through mass suffrage. See Gaetano Mosca, *Che Cosa e la Mafia,* (Bi Classici: USA, 2016).

a phenomenon which impairs the parliamentarian's ability to perceive the broader scope of the difficulties facing the majority of people (528).

Far more importantly, Mosca declares, the notion that elections provide the opportunity for the masses to elect someone who will represent their interests is a fantasy. The people cannot elect one of their own "to represent the country," he says, simply because of the enormous wealth that electoral candidacy presupposes (Mosca 1982, 528). On this point, he considers the recent proposal for salaried offices offensive because it inappropriately slights mass epistemic capacities for judgment and pretends to promote lower class representation in the government. The poor are not effectively prohibited from candidacy because they have difficulty "maintaining and deploying capital once they are in office," a task which, he quips, "does not require all that much frugality or competence" despite what lawmakers may want us to believe (528). The working classes do not fill the halls of the legislature, he states, "because they do not have enough capital to run for office in the first place" (528). Instead of ensuring that incumbents have access to even more funds, an effective (and, incidentally, truly democratic) proposal would offer an "indemnity to poor candidates in order to overcome campaign expenses, allowing them to develop the affluence and influence initially required to be elected" (528c). Here the Italian proffers a type of political affirmative action for the poor, as it were, a policy that certainly defies the elitist or anti-popular characterization that will later be attributed to him.

According to Mosca, "active and energetic" government intervention that redistributes the grosser discrepancies between rich and poor offers a practicable solution to the plutocratic tendencies of electoral outcomes (Mosca 1982, 528). But here again, the circularity of the plutocracy endemic in representative regimes re-presents itself: the domination of the government by the wealthy, he claims, obstructs proper redistribution since the wealthy "will never damage their own interests in order to improve the condition of the poor" (528). Although this parliamentary-

plutocratic connection constitutes a "grave" structural drawback of modern representative governments, he vows that his historical investigation attests to the fact that proactive redistribution has proven to alleviate the issue (528). If only there was a way to get the current ruling class to agree (528).

Mosca spends the rest of his time persuading elite readers to adopt preemptive redistributive measures, which he suggests actually constitutes the most moderate approach to the problem of plutocracy. Half of the battle lies in rejecting the particularly insidious delusion that circles among the educated elite: that elections independently create popular representation or expressions of popular sovereignty. If anything, he writes, his analysis demonstrates that "despite their claims to the contrary," parliamentary government epitomizes the English "spirit of aristocracy" because it separates "the rich…from the people" (Mosca 1982, 532). For Mosca, English "political institutions breed arrogance, hardness of heart, and a form of contrived gallantry" incompatible with popular government (532; 533).[18] Exclusive reliance on electoralism causes "the chic and the *bon ton* [to] become the arbiters of modern society," an aristocratic orientation that has "unfortunately already begun to seep into Italian political life" (*è purtroppo penetrato anche nei nostri costumi*) as a result of the Risorgimento's recent adoption of Anglo-liberal ideals (533).

Exporting English liberalism to the peninsula, Mosca warns, will have dire effects on the current Italian ruling class. He contends that hypocritical English customs and institutions severely aggravate the separation between social classes, inducing "the poor man…to believe that the rich

[18] For an explanation of the antagonistic Italian orientation toward English analytic liberalism, see Mario Ricciardi, "Political philosophy across the Atlantic: a difficult relationship?" in *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, Vol. 10 (2005), 59-77.

man is his enemy, that he sucks his blood, that he laughs at his pain" (Mosca 1982, 532; 533).[19] Part of the snub derives from the fact that in the English paradigm, the rich adopt the habit of suggesting their liberal practices constitute fair and even egalitarian instantiations of representation, which strike the downtrodden Italian lower classes as cruel jokes meant to debase them further (533).[20]

Claims of parliamentary representation in spite of obvious and continued oppression of the poor by the rich, Mosca repeats, will only incite a rather understandable working class (*operai and contadini*) uprising (Mosca 1982, 525). To be clear, he asserts that these insurrections do not come from plebian "jealousy of their riches or delusions of their own grandeur" (526). They develop as a result of a rightful "vendetta against those who have commanded them, from the rancor which developed over a long period of oppression (*del rancore da tanto tempo accumulati*) (526). The rich must publicly admit that this "inequality exists, that it must be remedied, and that the poor classes suffer from a social injustice," Mosca asserts (534). Nevertheless, a commitment to political realism is a necessary but insufficient condition to resolve the issue. Beyond honest acknowledgement and intellectual sincerity, serious action in the form of redistribution must be continually taken to relieve such gross disparities. If existing elites do not soberly enact concrete measures, Mosca warns, "working class anger will foment" and it will take only a "match to topple the current political class" (534).

In the conclusion of the work, Mosca more emphatically casts his plea to existing parliamentarians and heightens fear of the current order's waning stability. Given the plutocratic

[19] In a classified essay for the Department of Defense, Harry Eckstein emphasizes Mosca's point that the elite "live in a totally different environment from the non-elite" incites rebellion, but he does not do so in his published political theory on the Italian. H. Eckstein, *Social Science Research and National Security* 437464, prepared for the Department of Defense, Alexandria, Virginia: Smithsonian Institution, (March 5th, 1963), 119.

[20] Cf. the ubiquitous view that Mosca was nostalgic for the greatness of nineteenth century European liberalism (Meisel 1962, 19).

problems elucidated in the preceding chapters, Mosca predicts that in Italy "*pure* parliamentary regimes" will likely fail (Mosca 1982, 535; 537 *emphasis added*). To avoid such a breakdown, "radical reform of the entire political class is necessary"—a reform which rebuilds a political class committed to an authentic meritocracy and ensures "reciprocal control of the its members" to the broader population (*e il reciproco controllo fra tutti i suoi membri*) (537). Only through economic redistribution can *la classe politica* create adequate channels for contestation from the lower classes and genuine access to entry into the legislative body (537). Like Pareto, Mosca incessantly warns the current ruling class of the consequences to their own power if they do take the necessary measures towards self-imposed restraint: they will be entirely replaced by a more competent, less corrupt cohort.

But unlike Pareto, Mosca explicitly cautions against understanding his distrust of plutocracy as an attempt to thwart any trace of electoral institutions in a future political form. Although he has been accused of "wanting to destroy" parliamentary government without knowing how to "rebuild it," he says that his cynicism about the popular character of electoral regimes certainly need not be interpreted in that vein (Mosca 1982, 537).[21] His assessment of the problems facing parliamentary government ought to encourage reform by "outlining the directions of a broad assignment which cannot be performed by a single man of action" or a small coterie of individuals (537). This "*compito,*" he asserts, must be taken up with "the energy of an entire people—of an entire generation which will prepare and realize a better form of government" by keeping his admonitions of plutocracy in mind (536).

On a broad scale, Mosca suggests constant monitoring of the minorities in power as the important first step in advancing the next generation's *compito* to keep plutocracy at bay. If anything,

[21] For an exposition of Mosca's anti-parliamentary orientation in context, see "Il Significato dell'Antiparlamentarismo Italiano del Secolo Scorso" in Mario delle Piane, *Gaetano Mosca: Classe Politica e Liberalismo* (Napoli: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1952).

his theory of "political history"—the forerunner to his theory of the ruling class—should attune the "entire people" to patrolling:

> the degree of coordination between the various political classes, the amount of resources under their control, the force of their collective action, the various elements which enter into these classes, and the different ways in which they impose their will, the rivalry and struggles between them, their mutual transactions and combinations…(Mosca 1982, 42).

By adopting such a vigilant attitude toward the various elite sects that make up the ruling class, Mosca claims that awareness of the composition, resources, and power of a particular ruling group can serve as a protective instrument against their corruption, and additionally, against less overt demonstrations of minority domination that manifest themselves under the legitimating color of electoral institutions. In this sense, the closing note of *Teorica* sounds like a clarion call for future democratic action against the plutocratic domination of parliamentary government—and not a conservative, anti-democratic attempt to thwart universal suffrage or other mechanisms of popular participation.

Richard Bellamy, one of the Anglo-American world's most astute readers of Mosca's political thought, recognizes that Mosca's (and Pareto's) chief aim in developing elite theories was to offer a "description of contemporary politics [that] revealed the manipulation of democratic procedures by economic interests" (Bellamy 1992, 43). But herein lies a consequential misunderstanding of the Italian school: Although Bellamy rightly acknowledges the Italian anxiety over plutocracy, for Mosca and Pareto these representative procedures are not inherently democratic, and moreover, for the Italians even calling them such bears deleterious consequences for the health of the polity. Nowhere in *Teorica* does Mosca call liberal conceptions of freedom or electoralism "democratic." In his vocabulary, they amount to what people in his own time call "liberal," and he even explicitly blames English parliamentarism for confusing these two ideas

(Mosca 1982, 536). The whole point, in this text at least, is that representative institutions are often anti-democratic because they covertly foster plutocracy, and moreover, that they can cause considerable harm to the legitimacy of a popular regime when they are disingenuously touted to be essentially democratic in character. Taken in its entirety, *Teorica* indicates that the conflation of democracy and liberal elections constitute the absurdity of our epoch, the one which "future generations will immediately recognize but to which we are currently blind" (201).

The Soft Mosca: Elementi di Scienza Politica in 1896, 1923, and 1939

At the time of writing *Teorica*, Mosca was disturbed by the way that both socialist and liberal doctrines exhibited confidence in the progressive advancement against domination, but he was particularly vexed by the way that parliamentary institutions, through plutocracy, economically oppress the lower classes, stifling their ability to contest the ruling group and consequently hold them accountable. He describes these tendencies as a chain reaction which threatens the stability of contemporary popular regimes. Yet precisely because of his uninhibited criticism of representative procedures, most scholars identify *Teorica* as evidence of Mosca's anti-democratic propensities.

As discussed in the last chapter, postwar scholars will contend that Mosca minimized the anti-democratic, conservative posture of *Teorica* when he tempered his critique of electoral institutions in his next major work, *Elementi di Scienza Politica*, thereby constituting a reversal from the resolutely elitist stance of his youth. By contrast, I argue that Mosca's assessment of electoral institutions developed out of a cynical but still popular orientation against plutocracy, one that remains relatively consistent despite his moderated attitude towards liberalism in the 1920's. Contextualizing the evolution of *Elementi's* three editions (1896, 1923, and 1939) with respect to

positivism, socialism and liberalism helps make sense of Mosca's political pessimism and its later obfuscation.[22]

A dozen years after the publication of *Teorica*, Mosca had not yet tired of his methodological debate with Pollyanna positivists nor of his political disagreement with naive socialists. *Elementi* debuted in 1896 as a treatise in conversation with both nineteenth-century socialist philosophy and positivist dominance in the burgeoning social sciences because he saw these two movements as suffering from the same ailments of Enlightenment optimism. The positivist invasion of the academy now strikes him as more threatening than ever because he fears that their self-proclaimed "scientific" posture will lead to an anti-historical orientation—one which either latently justifies elite domination in the study of politics, or at the very least, promotes a quietest response to it.

The first chapter of *Elementi* therefore protests against the precursors of rational choice style theories, social Darwinism and all racial theories—the reigning "scientific" approaches to social science of the day. Most clearly, Mosca finds the application of evolutionary theories to political science shockingly dangerous. "No satisfactory law has been found on the basis of racial diversities," he says, "nor is it possible to ascribe the progress or the ruin of nations to organic improvement or organic degenerations or races" (Mosca 1939, 39' 114). Mosca views this approach to social theory formation as the conservative force crippling political science, as its progressive epistemology legitimates existing structures of domination on suspect grounds of "scientific" claims to objectivity.

Similarly, Mosca finds self-interest based paradigms no less inaccurate but less insidious because their superficiality, he believes, will not let them take stronghold in the discipline: "The

[22] Mosca edited the English translation of *Elementi* alongside Arthur Livingston, a translation which bears so many new additions and deletions to the 1923 text that it constitutes a third edition in its own right. Livingston Papers, Box 7, Folder 11, Harry Ransom Center. The University of Texas at Austin.

person who wrote that the human being lets himself be guided by self-interest alone stated a general maxim that is almost entirely devoid of practical value," he states, "since it can tell us nothing save at the cost of exceedingly minute analyses and distinctions" (Mosca 1939, 39). Understanding human behavior in terms of arbitrary, de minimis, but quantifiable metrics of self-interest helps justify corrupt forms of elite power because it presumes that once these random units of interest are satisfied, domination no longer exists. And besides, "anyone who thinks that interest has to be something that can be expressed materially in terms of money and measured in pounds and pence," he continues, "is a person of too little heart and too little head to understand the people about him" (114). Ironically, interest-based paradigms and rational choice theories will not only control political science in fifty years' time, but Mosca will be considered one of the founders of such a "value free" approach.[23]

Elementi thus constitutes a more pronounced rejection of the dominance of positivism in social theory than the earlier presentation in *Teorica*. Mosca's polemic against the "inward" scientific paradigm closely anticipates later attempts to discredit the formation of objective criteria to demonstrate 'truth' in fields of traditional hermeneutic inquiry. His work champions a "return to the old historical method" and contends that the most basic foundation (*elemento)* of political science is actually a "broad and historical knowledge of history…of mankind as a whole" (Mosca 1939, 41).[24] *Elementi* does not outline a new method required for the future 'science of politics' but rather calls

[23] In the United States, Mosca's work became known primarily through Charles Merriam, the founding father of the empirical-behavioral school of American political science. This reception may have prompted Mosca's reputation as a "value free" social scientist. See Joseph LaPalombara, "The Study of Gaetano Mosca in the United States," in Ettore Albertoni, *Studies on the Political Thought of Gaetano Mosca* (Milano: Giuffre, 1982), 156.

[24] On Mosca's contribution to the founding of modern Italian political science, see Antonio Lombardo, *Sociologia e scienza politica in Gaetano Mosca* in *Rivista di Italia, Scienza Politica*, n. 2 (1971), 297-323.

for a back to the basics historical approach that allows for "multiplicities" of interpretation to exist concurrently within the discipline (47). Although scientific objectivity and "value-free" investigations may sound more promising in the current epistemological environment, Mosca maintains that the historian's cynicism has always offered an effective antidote to such cheerful delusions and conceits.

Optimistic hubris also constitutes the main problem with Marxist theory, and in this respect Mosca understands positivism and Marxism to be conjoined twins. At bottom, he writes, both Auguste Comte and Karl Marx are disciples of Saint-Simon, who believed that "control over society was to belong in the future to a scientific aristocracy…and that such a form of government would be a necessary consequence of the 'positive' stage which the human mind had attained in the nineteenth century" (Mosca 1939, 330). For Comte, the management of society would be left in the hands of a "scientific priesthood"; for Marx, it would find itself in the hands of the "whole collectivity," but their shared assumption of the progressive development of the ruling class remains consistent (330). Each doctrine, Mosca relates, proposes that "an evolutionary process in society would inevitably lead" to a superior "system of political and economic management" that increasingly minimized and, in the case of Marxism, ultimately eradicated oppression (330).

According to James Meisel, the first half of *Elementi* should be read as a Marxist response "aimed at the naïve optimism of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment" (Meisel 1958, 10). In particular, Mosca bemoaned that Marxism had "inherited that [Enlightenment] confidence" and sought specifically to contest the progressive premise of history conceived in terms of class struggle (10). For Meisel, Mosca's cynical retort—that history is instead a graveyard of aristocracies—meant to highlight that "forever new elite formations eternalize the cycle of domination," to remind readers that exploitation exists no matter which economic modality dominates a given historical period (10). When seen in this light, the tenor of Mosca's opposition to Marxist theory becomes more clear: By

contesting progressive assumptions, Mosca sought to undermine the confidence of Marxist doctrine, and not its political ends, in order to better fortify theoretical instruments against domination.

Unsurprisingly, Mosca's interpretation of Marxist theory directly translates to his understanding of all variants of socialist philosophy. Put simply, for Mosca socialist optimism promotes a complacent attitude toward domination. The socialists dangerously assume too much, he writes, as they:

> are evidently counting on a moral progress which *they say* will be attained, in order to bring into existence a type of social organization which *assumes* that progress has already been attained, and which in all probability would be able to function *only if that progress had been attained*" (Mosca 1939, 291).

Contrary to popular belief, this assumption of progress relaxes defensive strategies against elite control, he maintains, and as a result, such a socialist form of organization "would only be repeating on a large scale…the mistake [of unwarranted confidence] to which we primarily owe the current evils of parliamentarism" (Mosca 1939, 291).

As an alternative to this hopeful posture, Mosca's focus on *la classe politica* or *la classe dirigente* spotlights the recurring cycle of oppression in order to demonstrate that "the setbacks of one nation or another, or the catastrophes that threaten them, [should] not [be] so much ascribed to the ignorance of the masses or to the wickedness of men in power as to *the incompetence and inadequacy of the ruling class*," and consequently, the need for their reform or their ousting (Mosca 1939, 332). Mosca uses the terms political class (*la classe politica*) and ruling class (*la class dirigente*) interchangeably, in order to describe a broader group that necessarily includes politicians but also highlights those who exercise formidable control over them in the parliamentary context (Mosca 1939, 332 *emphasis added*).

This means that notwithstanding Mosca's advocacy for reform of the ruling class through cooptation of individuals from below, a ruling class can and in some cases must be entirely replaced—not just amended through select lower class absorption into the governing body. In fact, given their ostentatious displays of incompetence and corruption, that is precisely what liberal defenders of representative government, he suggests, ought to be worried about.

To his Italian colleagues, there was no question that the first edition of *Elementi* sought to deconstruct the optimistic intellectual currents of the time in order to accentuate the problem of plutocracy. The 1896 version of the work qualified as a finalist for the Accademia dei Lincei best book prize within the social and economic sciences category.[25] In one reviewer's summary, Mosca's attention to *la classe politica* questioned the durability of electoral institutions given "the social question," and proposed remedies for the contradiction between continued economic oppression and the "extension of social democracy" (Relazione sul Concorso 1895, 381). At the end of the nineteenth century, at least within the Italian milieu, Mosca's anti-plutocratic aims were more than evident.

Mosca did not win the award for two reasons. First, the reviewers found his methodology too historical (*metodo storico*) to warrant consideration for a prize in the social and economic sciences (*dovesse considerare come tale da poter concorrere ad un premio bandito per le scienze sociali ed economiche,* Relazione sul concorso 1895, 381; 382). More importantly, the reviewers felt that *Elementi* did not constitute a novel contribution to the literature. Although the problem of parliamentary plutocracy poses a "complicated issue currently prominent in the life of the people," (*complessi e prominenti nella vita dei*

[25] "Relazione sul concorso al Premio Reale per le Scienze sociali ed economiche, Scaduto il 31 dicembre 1895—Commissari: Boccardo, Bodio, Lampertico, Messedaglia e Ferraris" in Gaetano Mosca, 1881-1964, Archivi Di Famiglie e di Persone; Archivi di Personalità della Politica e Della Pubblica Amministrazione, Busta 1, Fascicolo N 3—Sottofascicolo 4; Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Roma.

popoli), the committee ultimately judged that the division of society between rulers and ruled does not constitute a "felicitous innovation" (*non felice innovazione*) or even a compelling "political law" (382). Everyone knows that plutocracy vexes the newly established parliamentary state, one reviewer remarks, but dividing society between "rulers and ruled neither supplements nor replaces the old Aristotelian regime classifications"; it is simply too obvious a presupposition to belabor (381). Besides, focus on the sovereigns of a given society, another reporter notes, has characterized political thought since time immemorial (381). To the Accademia dei Lincei, a theory dedicated to uncovering the particularities of a specific ruling classes' power seemed gratuitous.

The 1896 edition of *Elementi* thus did not fare as well among the upper crust of the Italian intellectual community as Mosca had hoped, but it was far better received among the broader public. Throughout the first two decades of the twentieth century, Mosca's identification of *la classe politica* or *la classe dirigente* with a plutocratic elite (one that included but was not confined to the political sector) became increasingly popular, especially among the early fascists. Professionally benefiting from its popularity, in the early 1920's Mosca decided to write a second edition of *Elementi* (1923) in which he expanded his treatment of *la classe dirigente* into a full chapter—a decision which, ironically, helped him win life appointments to the University of Rome and the Italian Senate. However, at the same time he became concerned by the destruction of liberal safeguards and, consequently, began to distance himself from Mussolini—distance which culminated in a sensational denunciation of fascism, resignation from the Senate, and signing of the Manifesto of Anti-Fascist Intellectuals in 1925.[26]

[26] For a parsimonious summary of Mosca's anti-fascism, see Joseph Femia, "Mosca Revisited" in *European Journal of Political Theory*. Vol. 23: 1 (1993), 145-161.

During the twenty-five-year period between the first two editions, fascism changed the Sicilian student of socialism. No longer interested in socialist philosophy or its positivist counterpart, Mosca felt that there was a larger threat to society than liberal plutocratic domination: in a word, the experience of fascism softened his attitude toward liberalism. While at the turn of the century he argued that parliamentary systems have "failed miserably" to inhibit the plutocratic transformations of liberalism, in the 1923 publication, shortly after Mussolini's rise to power, Mosca attributed to the representative system the highest degree of "juridical defense" against elite domination ever attained in history (Mosca 1939, 325). While in the 1890's, Mosca took openness and discussion between elite sects for granted, later in the twentieth century he came to appreciate the importance of this feature of liberalism in light of Mussolini's ascent to power. Mosca's experience with fascism and consequent change of heart thus led to a dramatic revision of his magnum opus in a way that obscures his original anxiety over plutocracy and liberalism.

And yet, even though Mosca's disdain for the liberal plutocratic nexus was far more explicit in 1896, his concern remains evident in the last edition. Although in the 1939 edition Mosca "insisted on deleting the study of the Roman question"—the part explicitly devoted to plutocracy, I unearth his critique of liberal plutocracy using the final version of *Elementi* to reveal his consistent analysis of plutocracy despite his evolving attitude, and to demonstrate how the ruling class theory functions within *Elementi*, even in its most mature formation.[27] On Mosca's pessimistic account of the inevitability of oligarchy, frank acknowledgement of plutocratic tendencies in liberal societies helps orient us toward the need for ever increasing "multiplicities" of elites and the "democratic"

[27] Artur Livingston, Introduction to *The Ruling Class*, trans. Hannah Kahn, ed. Arthur Livingston (New York: McGraw Hill Company Inc., 1939), xl.

renewal of leadership from below—the "indispensable" element to anything that can be likened to human "progress" (Mosca 1939, 415).[28]

Mosca's ruling class theory contends that the composition of the ruling class changes when the management of the state requires capacities different from those made available by the status quo (Mosca 1939, 65). *Elementi* insists that efforts to track changes in the makeup of ruling classes should be only one, albeit crucial, variable among others in the study of politics. While his endeavor at first appears to focus exclusively on a select group of elites, through the course of the book it becomes clear that he intends his analysis of the ruling class to serve as an analytic tool that may be used to study dynamics among all social classes at various historical junctures. The ruling class theory does not fixate on inevitable domination by a minority; it constitutes one technique among others employed in his more comprehensive study of political change.

According to Mosca, the ruling class theory does not create "labels for the various types of ruling classes," but bids us to "examine the contents of *our* bottles and investigate and analyze the criteria that prevail in the constitution of the ruling classes on which the strength or weakness of *our* states depend" (Mosca 1939, 443, *emphases added*). In this passage, Mosca instructs the reader to use the ruling class theory as a tool for inward reflection on our own polities— as a way to candidly assess our own "strengths and weaknesses" without deluding ourselves about who maintains power in contemporary society. He suggests that honest investigation and sober self-analysis can prompt the desire to change the constitution of the ruling classes for the better, as opposed to simply enumerating, or "labeling" types of ruling groups to no constructive end. The ruling class theory

[28] When translated to English, the title of Mosca's treatise was transformed from its literal equivalent 'Elements of Political Science' to *The Ruling Class*. With this change in title, one element traced in his treatise on political science—the law of the political class or, as it was subsequently translated, the "theory of the ruling class"—became his defining contribution. This furthered the perception that the ruling class theory was Mosca's desired normative prescription.

thus offers a useful heuristic that promotes candid confrontation with existing structures of domination; it does *not* simply serve to encourage a dispassionate assessment of irresistible political laws.

Similar to his formulation in *Teorica*, in *Elementi* Mosca's rhetoric suggests that the ruling class theory can even serve as a subversive tool in disrupting the domination of a particular ruling class. He reminds the reader that given the "various ways in which the ruling classes are formed and organized [it] is precisely in that variety of type that *the secret* of their strength and weakness must be sought and found,"—as if to say that identifying this "secret" helps undermine or eliminate an undesirable elite (Mosca 1939, 336, *emphasis added*). The power of an organized minority over the majority is "inevitable," Mosca famously states, but "at the same time," the minority becomes "organized for the very reason that it is a minority" (53). Far from encouraging acceptance of uncontainable minority domination, the ruling class theory implies that organization constitutes the only resource minorities have against the far more formidable power that lies inherent in a numerical majority—that is, if they choose to employ it.

Add to this idea Mosca's view that the "democratic impulse"—that is, the constant "replenishing of ruling classes from the lower classes"—is the key to human advancement, and his drive to identify elite strengths and weaknesses reads much more like an exposé of minority domination that encourages democratic renewal of political leadership from below, rather than a celebratory promotion or resigned acceptance of elite rule (Mosca 1939, 395). Importantly, Mosca sets this democratic impulse in contrast to both the autocratic transfer of power from above, through inheritance or appointment, and in contrast to the "liberal principle, which transfers power between elite minorities through elections. Taken together, his arguments advocate the demystification of elite power as a potential corrective to the insufficiency of liberal institutions in checking plutocratic tendencies—institutions that Mosca ultimately (after the advent of fascism)

endorses but always admits are weak in the face of plutocratic tendencies that elude parliamentary regulation.

Despite removing the chapter dedicated to Roman plutocracy, Mosca weaves a critique of plutocracy into his accounts of the ancient, medieval and modern civilizations he assesses.[29] The book treats plutocracy as an unavoidable tendency throughout history against which we must constantly be on guard and seek to contain, a normative orientation confirmed by condemnations of its presence in modern governments scattered throughout the text. He warns that electoral politics can never forestall or control plutocracy once these institutions are wedded to unrestrained capitalistic structures. The American context provides a paradigmatic example, he writes, where nothing can prevent the rich from becoming more influential than the poor because the rich will always effectively pressure the politicians who control public administration (Mosca 1939, 325). For Mosca, America proves that liberal constraints do not "prevent elections from being carried on to the music of clinking dollars…or whole legislatures and considerable numbers of national congressmen from feeling the influence of powerful corporations and great financiers" (325). But the palpable pessimism in this critique of American plutocracy constitutes an encouragement toward reform—not a compulsion to compliance.

Much of the Anglo-American literature has focused on the way Mosca's thought was inspired by Machiavelli's "realistic" or "scientific" approach to studying politics and power.[30] But without appreciating his critique of plutocracy, the Sicilian's reading of his Florentine compatriot is severely impoverished. Mosca agrees with his predecessor's assessment that there exist two

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[29] In the introduction to the 1939 translation, Arthur Livingston emphasizes that Mosca insisted on removing this chapter (Mosca 1939, xl).

[30] James Burnham, *The Machiavellians.* New York: John Day Co, 1943); Giovanni Sartori, *Democratic Theory* (New York: Frederick A Praegar Publishers, 1965). 41.

tendencies in every polity, one "aristocratic" and the other "democratic," and if one had to choose, the democratic element is more responsible for anything that can account for effective political procedures and human advancement (Mosca 1939, 415).[31] Mosca also defends Machiavelli's view that rather than ignoring the tumults that transpire between these two elements, the institutionalization of the conflict between the "humors" offers the best guarantee that "the most severe and degrading poverty is avoided" and "that wealth is less the effect of birth and fortune [and more] the just reward for meritorious efforts and intelligent activity" (Mosca 1939, 59).[32]

Ultimately, however, Mosca finds Machiavelli's assessment wanting because Machiavelli is *not pessimistic enough* about the potential for plutocratic corruption of a ruling class. His verdict on Machiavellian thought offers the following suggestion:

> If some observer in our day were to note the ways in which private fortunes are made and unmade on our stock exchanges, in our corporations or in our banks, he could easily write a book on the art of getting rich that would probably offer very sound advice on how to look like an honest man and yet not be one, and on how to thieve and rob and still keep clear of the criminal courts. Such a book would, one may be sure, make the precepts that the Florentine Secretary lays down in his essay look likes jests for innocent babes (Mosca 1939, 202).

Here Mosca admonishes Machiavelli for focusing only on the fraud perpetrated by the political sect of the ruling class, and not emphasizing the part of the *classe dirigente* that can easily hide its rampant corruption through perfectly legal institutions like stock exchanges, corporations, and banks. This

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[31] Another discussion of this theme can be found in Mosca's inaugural lectures at the University of Turin (1902-1903), "The Aristocratic and the Democratic Principles" in Gaetano Mosca, *Partiti e sindacati nella crisi del regime parlamentare* (Bari: Laterza, 1949), 5.

[32] Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Discourses on Livy*, Chapter XXXIX, trans. Nathan Tarcov and Harvey Mansfield (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

type of fraud bears the mark of a regime characterized by plutocracy because the political class allows those who have "thieved and robbed" their way to "private fortunes" to steer "clear of the criminal courts." Mosca suggests that the plutocratic moment of the Italian Risorgimento would make Machiavelli's infamous descriptions of political deceit and domination seem benign.

In H. Stuart Hughes' account, well before the revised 1939 translation, the second edition of *Elementi* "already shows his transformation from a critic of parliamentary democracy into its defender—a skeptical defender, indeed, but an extremely effective one" (Hughes 1954, 148).[33] Admittedly, Mosca's critique of liberal institutions was certainly attenuated during Mussolini's ascent to power, when Mosca became a staunch critic of the Fascist regime, and a staunch supporter of the openness and discussion between elite sects that liberal parliamentary institutions allow.[34] Yet his anxiety over the ways parliamentary bodies become susceptible to plutocratic corruption and the uneasy conflation of democracy and liberal elections never disappear. Mosca always guarded against conflating parliamentary politics and democracy.

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[33] Mosca's fierce opposition to Mussolini is well-documented. Among many political acts against Mussolini, one speech made on December 19, 1925, reflects Mosca's view of his own position particularly well: "I never would have thought," he explained to the Senate, "that I would be alone in pronouncing the funeral oration for the parliamentary system. When I was in the Chamber of Deputies, I remember being surprised at the common practice whereby, when a former Deputy died, his funeral oration was nearly always delivered by his successor in the constituency, who in many cases had been the one to unseat him; so it happens that someone who had previously spoken ill of his opponents was then obliged to sing his praises. Similarly, I who have always been sharply critical of parliamentary government must now almost regret its fall. I admit that this system has been in need of considerable modification, but I don't think the time is right for a radical transformation, and now that the system is being renounced we should remember its merits." Gaetano Mosca, *Partite e sindaati nella crisi del regime parlamentare* (Bari: Laterza, 1974), 12.

[34] Mosca's protest against Mussolini's government came by way of speeches in support of civil liberties and parliamentary government along with a steadfast refusal to compromise with the regime. His anti-fascism profoundly influenced more famous opponents of the regime such as Antonio Gramsci, Gaetano Salevmini and Piero Gobbeti. Dirk Käsler, and Stephen Turner, *Sociology Responds to Fascism* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 70–75.

Even in the 1939 publication, Mosca implores his reader to refuse the tempting association between democracy and election. Under the representative system, Mosca says that we must face the fact that "the voters" never "choose" their representative (Mosca 1939, 154). "The truth is that the representative *has himself elected* by the voters," or to be more exact, Mosca says, "*his friends have him elected*" (154). The very structure of representation, he claims, prohibits "each voter [from] giving his vote to the candidate of his heart" (154). "If his vote is to have any efficacy at all, each voter is forced to limit his choice to a very narrow field, in other words to a choice among two or three persons who have some chance of succeeding," Mosca writes, and problematically, he continues, "the only ones who have any chance of succeeding are those whose candidates are championed by groups, committees, *by organized minorities*" usually determined by the means to become organized in the first place (155). In this context, it becomes imperative to uncover the interconnections between the representative and "his friends," as this network of ruling class sects exhibits the anti-democratic forces residing within electoral politics.

Although this depiction of representative government may sound resigned, Mosca insists that saving representative government from fascism requires direct confrontation with this reality. In an addition to the 1939 publication, Mosca does not renounce his earlier, more discernable position against the plutocratic tendencies of liberalism. The closing chapter discusses the ways that the representative system could be "restored" on a sounder basis, and intimates that his critique of parliamentarism constitutes an integral part of that effort—one that should continue to be "deeply pondered" in the present moment:

> Fifty-years ago the author of this volume opened his career as a writer with a book [*Teorica*] which was a book of his youth but which he still does not disown. In it he sought to *lay bare some of the untruths that lie imbedded in certain assumptions of the representative system,* and some of the defects of parliamentarism. Today advancing years have made him more cautious in

> judgment and, he might venture to say, more balanced. His conclusions at any rate are deeply pondered. As he looks closely and dispassionately at the conditions that prevail in many European nations and especially in his own country, Italy, he feels impelled to urge the rising generation to restore and conserve the political system which it inherited from its fathers (Mosca 1939, 491-2 *emphasis added*).

Mosca does not reject his youthful determination to identify the plutocratic challenges facing representative regimes because he suggests that those are the very same problems which have led Italy to adopt an authoritarian government antithetical to the "political system…of its fathers." In my view, that paternal heritage is broadly marked by the democratically republican ethos of local government characteristic of the Italian city-states—one most certainty antithetical to English liberal parliamentarism, but needless to say, one far more opposed to the autocracy that Mosca implies currently "prevails" in Mussolini's dictatorship and "in many European nations."

In this respect, Mosca and Pareto not only share a concern for the ways in which plutocracy transforms representative institution into an autocratic form, but they are also united in a common effort to "lay bare…the untruths" of representative government that prompt this authoritarian invasion of parliamentary regimes in the first place. Far more diplomatic than Pareto, Mosca does not call the threats inherent in the hypocritical, supposedly "democratic" assumptions of representative systems "demagogic plutocracy" or even authoritarian dictatorship, but his subtlety here would not have been lost on an audience living in Fascist Italy.

Parliamentary Government as the New Minority Domination: Pessimism in the Italian Context

Both *Teorica* and all three editions of *Elementi* present a view of representative government in which small, self-perpetuating cliques manage the political process; a situation in which the representative is never elected by his constituents, but rather had himself elected through plutocratic

manipulation managed by various sects. In this respect, Mosca and Pareto's critiques of socialism and liberalism bear similar features: they both present plutocratic depictions of parliamentary systems, staunch opposition to the conflation of democracy and election, and a general pessimistic orientation toward current elite capabilities for government. In their own ways, they urge reform or supplementation of these electoral procedures so that the Risorgimento does not become a mere organizational reshuffling that maintains structures of elite domination in purportedly "democratic" regimes. If preventative measures against plutocracy are not enacted, both the Ligurian aristocrat and the Sicilian statesman warn that parliamentary bodies will ultimately succumb to some form of authoritarianism, either through the possibility of understandable mass insurrection (Mosca) or by the more subtle invitation of a demagogic plutocrat (Pareto).

While Pareto uses angry, vitriolic condemnations of the existing ruling class to issue his warning, Mosca deploys a more restrained approach. The Sicilian also finds current elites corrupt and deficient, but in order to dispel the comforting, illusory idea that representative institutions foster egalitarian outcomes, his ruling class theory serves as an intellectual instrument that soberly forces acknowledgement of the plutocratic tendencies inherent in liberal government, and more importantly, actively encourages measures to combat them. While the democratic replenishing of the ruling class with members from the lower strata will do the most to mitigate mass oppression and promote regime stability, Mosca contends that this impulse will not develop naturally if electoral institutions remain unreformed. Such a replenishing of the ruling class can only occur if economic disparity between the masses and the elites, and between the North and South, is addressed. Either the existing ruling class implements economic change to cultivate this democratic impulse by creating genuine access into the governing body, or it shall perish and a new form of minority domination over the majority will prevail.

This narrative has always been a familiar one in *Mezzogiorno* political thought. Mosca's skepticism comes from millennia in which different governments succeeded control over his native Sicilian island. While the structural form of each government varied, the particularly oppressive command of the majority by the minority remained the same. Moreover, between the mid eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it was commonly feared that the democratic pretenses of the Risorgimento were simply a cover for Northern plutocratic exploitation of the South. From the southern perspective, Italian statehood had come to fruition because Giuseppe Garibaldi had garnered the majoritarian power of the Southern revolutionaries to fight the Kingdom of Two Sicily's, only to then offer their independence to the Kingdom of Savoy under the guise of "unification."

In this context, Tomasi di Lampedusa's proverb "in order for everything to remain the same everything must change" was born. On the most basic level, the maxim cautioned subjected southerners to be wary of the democratic expectations promised in the Risorgimento's liberal republican ideals, and more generally, sought to disincline the southern masses from supporting less than trustworthy [Northern] minorities promising their emancipation or sovereignty. In fact, Mosca admits that as a child he himself was hoodwinked into believing that his "democratic bordering on red" beliefs would be best served by liberal republican institutions imposed by the Savoyian constitutional monarchy (Mosca 1982, 187).[35] At University, Mosca realized that this confusing amalgamation of terms—liberal, republican, democratic, and so forth—all aimed to occlude the elite domination proposed in the Risorgimento's transfer of power (187-8). Like so many *meridionalisti*—

[35] For a compelling account of the way Mosca's Sicilian experience colored his political thought, see Ettore Albertoni, *Mosca and The Theory of Elitism*, trans. Paul Goodrick (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 110-120.

most notably, Antonio Gramsci—Mosca suggests that one way to remain vigilant against elite domination is to arm oneself with a systematically pessimistic attitude toward it.[36]

While Lampedusa's adage beseeches southern Italians to guard against the illusory democratic ideals of the Risorgimento, Lampedusa added that "after all is said and done, Sicilians are also Italians" (*anche i palermitani sono dopotutto Italiani*; Tomasi di Lampedusa 1958, 216). While the pessimistic orientation toward minority domination forms a characteristic feature of political thought in the *Mezzogiorno*, Pareto and Mosca's work attests to the fact that it also defines the Italian political disposition as a whole.

[36] For a study on the interconnection between Mosca and Gramsci's thought see Maurice Finocchiaro, *Beyond Right and Left: Democratic Elitism in Mosca and Gramsci* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

CHAPTER THREE

THE EDGE OF FATALISM
Michels and The Iron Law of Oligarchy

> The hardest thing to translate from one language into another is the tempo of its style, which is grounded in the character of the race or – to be more physiological – in the average tempo of its "metabolism." There are well-meaning interpretations that are practically falsifications; they involuntarily debase the original, simply because it has a tempo that cannot be translated…How could the German language…imitate Machiavelli's tempo…who…allows one to breath the fine dry air of Florence?
>
> — Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*

Although Robert Michels began as a card-carrying socialist passionately committed to the most revolutionary forms of syndicalism, the German sociologist's engagement with the Italian thinkers is believed to have encouraged his disillusionment with the movement and prompted his later embrace of fascist ideology in the 1920's.[1] Many view Michels' renowned "iron law of oligarchy" as the natural development of Pareto and Mosca's anti-socialist and anti-democratic elitism, furthering the perception that his personal affiliation with his Italian colleagues ultimately pushed him towards fascist conclusions (de Grazia 1949, 4).

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[1] David Beetham's paradigmatic study on Michels' transformation offers the most dedicated exposition on Michels' transition to fascism from this perspective. David Beetham, "From Socialism to Fascism: The Relation between Theory and Practice in the Work of Robert Michels: II. The Fascist Ideologue" in *Political Studies,* 25:2 (1977), 161-181. For other expressions of the view not treated in the following discussion, see Arthur Mitzman, *Sociology and Estrangement* (New York: Transaction Publishers, 1973) or Guenther Roth, *The Social Democrats in Imperial Germany* (Totowa, New Jersey: Bedminster Press, 1963).

While commentators often link Michels' alleged disdain for mass epistemic incapacities to Pareto's supposed predilection for crowd psychology, scholarship has focused primarily on "Mosca's young man" Michels and the Sicilian's "decisive" influence on him (Meisel 1958, vii; Cook 1971, 783).[2] Michels' conversion to fascism, it is maintained, should be seen especially in light of his flattering account of the Italian professor's brilliance in *First Lectures on Political Sociology* (*Corso di Sociologia Politica*), Michels' introductory lectures delivered at the University of Rome in 1927, where Mosca then held the chair of public law (Volpe 2015, 116-117). In these lectures Michels for the first time suggests that "only charismatic leadership could transcend organizational leadership and engender mass support for great tasks" (Wolfe 1992, 175). By implication, it seems to many that Mosca's theory of the ruling class and its focus on minority organization emboldened Michels in this plebiscitary, authoritarian direction, a move for which he was promptly rewarded: in 1928 Michels accepted Mussolini's offer to join the openly fascist faculty of Political Science at the University of Perugia.

Michels did inherit many of the Italians' precepts, but not on the grounds traditionally supposed. Much like Pareto and Mosca, I argue that Michels' "irony law of oligarchy" sought to restrict the growth of plutocracy and contain the oligarchic propensities of modern popular government by revealing the composition of electoral institutions—in Michels' case, by revealing the composition of electoral party structure. In line with both Italians, his account of oligarchy is based on the way that parties breed plutocratic manipulation of popular interests through unequal access to economic resources. From Mosca, Michels assumes cynical suspicion toward the organizational aspects of representative polities which generate minority domination. And as opposed to sharing a

[2] Although Michels made pilgrimages to Pareto's retirement home in Celigny, their relationship developed after Pareto's health had already deteriorated, and Michels developed stronger professional ties with Mosca.

disdain for mass cognitive deficiencies, Michels actually assumes from Pareto a vitriolic condemnation of elites' behavioral role in electoral systems—one which is central to his understanding of the "technical indispensability of leadership" (Michels 1962, 365).

All three members of the Italian School of Elitism initially held a distrustful disposition toward electoral politics, and in what follows I demonstrate that this orientation was not motivated by an essentially elitist, anti-egalitarian orientation that encouraged resignation to elite rule. For Pareto, Mosca and Michels, a commitment to democratic outcomes demands continual contestation of elite power through the ruthless exposure of majority domination by elite minorities. Michels' first work, *The Sociology of the Party* (1911), offers one permutation of the Italian orientation toward democracy, and in this chapter, I preview the way that American political scientists would later inappropriately interpret Michels' pessimism and its implications.

This is not to say, however, that Pareto, Mosca and Michels employed identical postures towards plutocracy, oligarchy and elites. Pareto and Mosca aimed to prompt a productive response that could engender an elite-induced corrective to the plutocratic corruption that they found rampant in Italian society. By contrast, the focus on plutocracy becomes sublimated in the Italo-German scholar's work, and Michels' broader interest in oligarchy outside of Italy renders his pessimism seemingly more fatalistic than the angry or sober warnings of his more strictly Italian counterparts. Most importantly, unlike the Italians, Michels does not as forcefully reject the modern conflation of democracy and election, an element that distinguishes the character of his contribution from that of the Italians.

Therefore, instead of identifying the continuities in their thought as the source of Michels' later authoritarian proclivities, I propose that his distinct appropriation of their pessimistic concerns, his more subtle emphasis on plutocratic oligarchy in representative regimes, and his acceptance of modern democracy as synonymous with electoral government may better account for his eventual

embrace of fascist precepts than the current narrative suggests.[3] The difference in emphasis, nuance and tone between the Italians on the one hand and the German on the other may reveal why it became tempting for postwar American political scientists to understand Pareto's and Mosca's focus on elites as a dead-end for democratic theory and participatory politics, but Michels' thought as a generative resource for it.

Plutocracy: Organization and Property

On the surface, Michels' biographical record seems to suggest that his arrival on the peninsula corrupted his socialist commitments and inspired his eventual defense of Mussolini's dictatorship. While in Germany, Michels was an active member of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), but after a mere four years working with the Italian revolutionary syndicalists in Turin—incidentally, where he met Pareto and Mosca—Michels dramatically abandoned all of his socialist affiliations in 1907. In 1911, he published his masterpiece, *On the Sociology of the Party System in Modern Democracy: Investigations of the Oligarchic Tendencies of Group Life*, which struck his intimates as an SPD insider's devastating betrayal of his previous Marxist loyalties.[4]

[3] Peter LaVenia's reconsideration of Michels' thought also dispels the assumption of Michels' fascist proclivities from 1904 – 1915 and underscores Michels' "counter oligarchic tendencies" during the period. However, LaVenia emphasizes these democratic propensities through the "structural dissimilarities" between *Sociology of the Party* and the Italian thinkers' works, as opposed to what I suggest here: that the continuities attest to Michels' counter-oligarchic tendencies, whereas the "dissimilarities" encouraged more authoritarian propensities. Peter LaVenia, "Rethinking Michels" *History of Political Thought*, 40:1 (2019), 111-137, 112.

[4] Although the definitive Collier translation of Michels' text entitles the work *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy*, I use the German title (*Zur Soziologie des Parteiwesens in der modernen Demokratie. Untersuchungen über die oligarchischenTendenzen des Gruppenlebens)* because it directly relates to the argument proposed in the chapter.

Sociology of the Party studies the composition and functioning of electoral politics through a socialist lens. In this text, Michels takes the most radical, left-wing parties of the movement as case studies to prove that in electoral governments, no party can qualify as democratic because of the bureaucratic organization that representative politics require. The party functions as a "state in miniature" such that, at the end of the work, Michels extrapolates his analysis to posit his infamous "iron law of oligarchy," which can be summarized, he states, as follows: "It is organization that gives birth to the domination of the elected over the electors, of the mandatories over the mandators, of the delegates over the delegators. Who says organization, says oligarchy" (Hands 1971, 170; Michels, 1962, 365).

Before Michels ever mentions this iron-clad law that he will propose at the end of the book, he must explain which particular features of electoral politics necessitate a type of organization that breeds oligarchy. Much like his Italian forebearers, Michels contends that representative institutions compel organization predicated on money, which consequently fosters plutocratic domination of the party. He takes pains to prove that in the German, French, and Italian Socialist parties, the bureaucratic apparatus essential for organization depends on significant capital to develop, and therefore "the danger of plutocracy arises from the fact that members of parliament must necessarily be men of means" (Michels 1962, 142).[5] In explaining the "financial power of leaders and the party," he describes the inner workings of the vicious plutocratic cycle that pervades party structure: the party's success depends on its cohesion developed through advanced bureaucracy, this bureaucratic development depends on the growth of the party treasury, the wealth of the treasury enriches the deputies, consequently inclining any such organization to be controlled by the wealthy (129).

[5] Cf. David Beetham "Michels and his Critics," *European Journal of Sociology*, 22:1 (1981), 80-90.

In representative systems, Michels contends, plutocracy develops more subtly and through more varied channels than in other oligarchic forms. There are, of course, the obvious reasons for plutocratic domination. As one might expect, in democratic parties where the organization is "not well supplied," he explains, there frequently "arises within the party a peculiar form of financial authority, since the comrades who are better endowed with means gain and retain influence through the pecuniary services which they render" (Michel 1962, 150). This dependence on wealthy officials, he says, promotes a state of affairs which is, for Michels, "eminently calculated to favor the predominance of [wealthy] deputies, who become the financial props of party administration, and thus are persons of importance whom the rank and file must treat with all possible respect" (143).

Dependence on and reverence for the wealthy appears both inside and outside of the internal apparatus to include other well-intentioned "patricians" who transcend the official party leadership. To take one crucial example, Michels asserts that "a plutocratic supremacy" develops in the press, or the communication channels of those parties which, "lacking means for the independent maintenance of their own organs, are forced to depend upon the pecuniary assistance given by well-to-do comrades" outside of the elected deputies (Michels 1962, 140). Even the most well-meaning philanthropic assistance to democratic aims often mutates into dependence on plutocrats, since "the principal shareholders in the newspapers," for instance, "possess a natural right of controlling its policy"—a feature which does not always benefit the egalitarian outcomes that the philanthropic assistance was initially intended to serve (140). Fortunately, during the Dreyfus affair *l'Humanité* (the French socialist newspaper of the time) "was supported by a syndicate

of wealthy Jews," but Michels suggests that for every beneficial act of philanthropy there is an equivalent one in which sinister interests prevail (140).[6]

This chain of dependence constitutes the most overt development of plutocracy within the party, Michels notes, a characteristic attribute of the socialist parties in France, Holland, and especially in Italy, which is particularly "poor" and primarily composed of "manual workers" (Michels 1962, 140). And while the Germans fancy themselves as superior in this regard, Michels claims that the SPD can exercise more independence than its European counterparts because of the atypical wealth of their party membership or the "well-to-do" members' ability to "contribute to the flourishing conditions of party finances"; that is to say, their ability to directly fund the party treasury without need for alms from outside private interests (141). At any rate, Michels goes on to show that this peculiar condition bears plutocratic consequences just the same. In Germany, "the financial superiority of the rich comrade over the poor one is often replaced by the superiority of the rich branch" over poor representation, he says, such that the party membership begins to look like a mini "aristocratic" regime far more quickly than its less effective arms in France, Holland or Italy (141).

Michels acknowledges that insiders attribute the aristocratic composition of the SPD to the fact that parties will "retain their essentially plutocratic character because elected officials are usually unpaid" (Michels 1962, 139). Renumeration may alleviate the influence of independently wealthy deputies or well-intentioned philanthropists, but Michels insists that it does not undermine the party's inherently plutocratic composition, as evidenced by both the French and German examples. When a change in state law created salary funds for elected officials, the French Socialist Party began paying its deputies the relatively high rate of 600 francs annually with the stipulation that 120 francs

[6] Following Lipset, many commentators will take Michels' point here as one merely about officials controlling "the means of communication," evacuating the plutocratic basis for the officials' power over these communication channels in the first place (Lipset 1962, 16).

per annum be dedicated as dues to the treasury to keep the party afloat, in order to maintain a party bureaucracy that does not directly depend on the pecuniary services of individual members (142). This measure prompted a "mass exodus" of deputies out of the party and the creation of a competing one because officials wished to "escape this heavy tax, and to preserve intact for themselves the fine round sum paid as salary by the state" (142). Although the congresses are still marked by "interminable discussions" about how to address this issue, Michels writes, "it has not taken long to discover that to despoil the deputies of a portion of their salary does not after all constitute the most efficacious means of preventing the formation within the party of an oligarchy of plutocrats" (143).

Here Michels describes yet another element of the electoral predicament: One the one hand, elected officials must be adequately paid to allow working class members access into the governing body while avoiding direct dependence on wealthy private citizens, either among or outside of the deputies themselves. On the other, renumeration does not protect the egalitarian elements of the organization that the party intends to preserve. As Michels states: "the non-payment of the party leaders or their remuneration on a very moderate scale does not afford any safeguard for the observance of democratic principles on the part of the officials" (Michels 1962, 143).

Even if the pitfalls exemplified by the French case can somehow be avoided, the German experience proves that plutocracy always infiltrates the party apparatus. Before 1906, the SPD provided the salaries of its deputies and did not encounter the same problems as the French, Michels says, by virtue of their "unshaken fidelity" to the ideals of the movement, a fidelity prompted by "the characteristic love of the German for his chosen vocation" (Michels 1962, 134). Nevertheless, the SPD's bureaucratic development facilitated plutocratic control of the party just the same, albeit through different channels. An "increase in the financial strength of the party, which first renders liberal payment of the officials possible," he states, "contributes greatly to nourish the

dictatorial appetites of the members of the party bureaucracy, who control the economic force of the party in virtue of their position as administrators" (147). In other words, if plutocracy does not initially characterize the party structure, then it will emerge eventually among officials through increased financial power and bureaucratic advancement.

Although the SPD proudly proclaims that they "have not yet lost contact with the masses," Michels says that their connection to them has nothing in common with an egalitarian or even representative relationship and actually resembles the plutocratic features of the Catholic Church (Michels 1962, 132). As he describes it, the Church and the SPD matured along the same lines of plutocratic and hierarchically organizational expansion:

> As the wealth of the Church increased, there increased the independence of the clergy, of the ecclesiastical employees, vis-à-vis the community. As representatives of the community they were in charge of the goods. Consequently, all those who had need of these goods, or wished in any way to speculate upon them, were dependent upon the clergy. This applied not only to medicants and to all kinds of receivers of alms, but also to those whose aim it was to swell the ranks of the clergy, or to succeed to the positions of these, all aspirants to sacerdotal honors. For the administration of the funds and for the conduct of affairs, Christianity needed a graded corps of employees. This was the origin of the hierarchy which changed the inner meaning of Christianity and perverted its aims (Michels 1962, 147).

For Michels, herein lies the precise "danger encountered by all democratic parties which possess an elaborate financial administration"—one especially "marked" in the case of the German SPD (Michels 1962, 147). Just like the medieval church, an electoral party needs ample "funds" to advance its political ambitions because it requires "employees," or people, to advance those aims by disseminating resources (147). And yet, the more advanced the party becomes in providing the means for furthering those ambitions, the more its political commitments are perverted by the

hierarchy intended to achieve them. Put differently, the hierarchical organization that representative politics mandates opposes the egalitarian aims of democratic socialist movements: as the organization increases in wealth it puts a select minority— "a graded corps of employees"—in charge of "the goods."

To be clear, these "employees" do not stay part of the petty bourgeoisie for long. They quickly develop into a plutocratic sect because their loyalties do not remain with their previous comrades they claim to represent or even with the principles of the movement. Instead, their interests become attached to the survival of the party because it is the organization that provides them with their living (Michels 1962, 221). More incisively, Michels says, the deputies come to believe that their own interests and the party are one and the same—all of a sudden, just like Louis XIV, they begin to the believe that "Le Parti, c'est moi" (221; Lenski 1980, 7). From this point forward, all the characteristics typical of a plutocratic caste follow suit. Nepotism, for example, develops within one generation, as the children of the new deputies often succeed their father's roles thanks to the "bourgeois upbringing" that their parents were able to buy with their party salaries (264). This phenomenon accelerates exponentially, Michels claims, to the point where "a constituency comes to be regarded as family *property*" (127 *emphasis added*).

Michels here describes a "damned if you do damned if you don't" situation: No matter which preventative measures are established, plutocracy develops out of electoral systems in which the political party constitutes the mechanism of representation. Most often, party revenue comes from direct contributions of the wealthy patrons, which creates dependence and intrenches the patrons in positions of leadership. If the treasury is supplied through the state or other means, the hierarchical structure needed to advance its political aims creates a minority cut off from the majority by access to its resources, i.e. its wealth. The plutocratic-electoral nexus, Michels laments,

"brings into existence strict relationships of dependence, of hierarchical superiority and inferiority, engendered by the invisible force of the great god Money…" (Michels 1962, 148).

Adopting Pareto's and Mosca's reprimand to their own peers, Michels scolds the SPD for claiming exceptionalism in their democratically organized party structure. In some sense they are the greatest offenders, he intimates, as they have adopted the same plutocratic means of oppression that the Catholic Church deployed at the apex of its financial power. With the bureaucratic apparatus at its fingertips, Michels accuses party leaders of having "for years…employed numerous methods of oppression, such as the threat to give no aid either in men or money on behalf of the electoral propaganda of a candidate from whose views they dissent" despite the fact that the "local comrades give this candidate their full confidence" (Michels 1962, 148). The SPD's claims to superiority are particularly appalling to the working-class masses in light of the party's constant touting of their moto, "*ni Dieu ni Maitre*"— "no gods, no masters" (148). To everyone else outside of the SPD leadership, including Michels, it is obvious that the "great god Money" clearly triumphs (148).

Michels thus emphatically underscores the "financial power of leaders" in a way that attests to the systemic plutocracy inherent in the electoral party system. Far from tangential, the idea that electoral organization depends on the development of a plutocratic sect forms the basis for his contention that organization generates oligarchy; it constitutes the precise reason why he insists that "who says organization, says oligarchy." While the dictum itself seems to focus only on oligarchy, Michels insists that parties are particularly prone to oligarchy because of the money-raising need upon which they depend.

In his classic 1953 study on the iron law of oligarchy published in the *American Political Science Review*, C.W Cassinelli argues that the term oligarchy is too narrow a term for the phenomenon that Michels sought to describe. Michels must have meant something else far less aristocratic than it sounds, Cassinelli suggests; he certainly did not mean to propose the affinity between plutocracy and

representative government. The "term 'oligarchy' is not especially fortunate," Cassinelli writes, "since its ordinary connotation is more narrow than the one that must be given it in the present discussion, and since it is ordinarily ambiguous, referring both to rule by the few and to rule by the wealthy" (Cassinelli 1953, 777). Michels was indeed clearly referring "both to rule by the few and to rule by the wealthy," but like so many Anglo-American political scientists, Cassinelli would not entertain the notion that representative government instantiates the necessarily plutocratic features that, for Michels, party organization requires.

Oligarchy: Organization, Minority Domination and Elite Competition

Through the work of postwar political scientists, who were intent on advancing democracy understood as representative government, Michels came to be identified as a theorist of oligarchy and not of plutocracy.[7] This characterization is not especially fortunate, but it points toward one reason why Mosca and Michels have been so often coupled in the last century: Both the Italian and the German identify plutocracy as the means by which a minority group exerts oligarchic power in electoral government, but unlike Pareto, they subsume plutocracy into their respective accounts of oligarchy, an element which prompts later interpreters to entirely neglect their worry over the particularly plutocratic threats of representative politics.[8]

Michels thus assumes Mosca's cynical orientation toward the way that electoral institutions, through economic inequalities, structure organization such that a minority always rules. However,

[7] Jeffrey Winters criticizes Michels for purportedly obscuring the fact that since Aristotle's formulation, rule of the few has always meant rule of the rich (Winters 2001, 16).

[8] Beyond their personal affiliation, Mosca and Michels are often paired against Pareto on methodological grounds: Mosca and Michels seem to be more aligned as sociologists who study the "scientific question," whereas Pareto, as a trained economist, offered a more economic understanding of society. Gerard Lenski, "In Praise of Mosca and Michels," *Mid-American Review of Sociology* 5:2 (Winter 1980), 1-12 2.

Mosca and Michels disagree about the causal direction of this relationship. In Giorgio Sola's pithy formulation, "For Mosca, oligarchy adopts an organization in order to consolidate and impose its power; for Michels it is organization that generates oligarchy, in order to ensure its survival in a hostile environment and achieve the goals it proposes to achieve" (Sola 2001, 93).

Recall that for Mosca, an elite organizes because it recognizes itself as a minority and deploys the power of organization to compensate for and combat the majority's numerical power. In Mosca's analysis, existing minorities in representative polities use organizational tactics that the electoral system provides in order to consolidate its power. Michels, however, identifies a different starting point with more far-ranging implications: Not only does oligarchy spring from organization, he argues, but so do all forms of democratic action. Michels identifies organization as the source of both oligarchy and democracy.

According to Michels, proletarian interests can only be served by the organizational oligarchy that representative politics mandate because existing plutocratic interests are too strong of a force to oppose. "In the hands of those who are economically stronger," Michels states, "the working class is defenseless" (Michels 1962, 61). In order to fight those economically superior forces, the masses must "acquire the faculty of political resistance and attain social dignity only by combination to form a structural aggregate"—that is to say, only by organizing their numerical majority and by combining into a cohesive group (62). And yet again, when the masses come together to develop and coordinate that structural aggregate against the economically superior minority, he writes, they are themselves ensnared into the same trap of domination:

> Yet this politically necessary principle of organization, while it overcomes that disorganization of forces which would be favorable to the adversary, brings other dangers in its train. We escape Scylla only to dash ourselves on Charybdis. Organization, in fact, is the

> source from which the conservative currents flow over the plain of democracy, occasioning there disastrous floods and rendering the plain unrecognizable (Michels 1962, 62).

For Michels, at least within representative government, organization is "*the only weapon* of the weak against the strong"; it constitutes "*the only means* for creation of a collective will" (Michels 1962, 61; 62 *emphasis added*). But once the working classes have organized, he says, they fail to recognize "the real fount of the oligarchical evil in the centralization of power within the party, they often consider the best means of counteracting oligarchy is to intensify this very centralization" (166). For this reason, "as democracy continues to develop, a backwash sets in," and "with the advance of organization, democracy tends to decline" (70). In this tautological paradigm where organization constitutes the "real fount" of oligarchy and democracy, minority domination may indeed seem to constitute too irresistible of a force to oppose.

Michels nevertheless offers some qualified hope, as he eventually concludes that the chances for success in the battle against elite domination "will depend upon the degree to which this struggle is carried out upon a basis of solidarity between individuals whose interests are identical" (Michels 1962, 61).[9] But given Michels' brutal account of the organization of leadership both within the oligarchic consolidation of power *and* within nascent democratic action that aims to combat this consolidation, "identical" sounds like too high a bar. Whereas Mosca proposes to keep interests aligned by alleviating gross economic inequality, Michels remains silent on this score, and his pessimism seems to suggest more determinism than he will later, at the end of the book, claims exists.

[9] Michels here invokes a debate about revolutionary versus reformist trade unionism, an element which Przeworski will pick up in his appropriation of elite theory to argue that since Michels shows these interests cannot be identical, election should be considered the primary condition to distinguish democratic regimes from non-democratic ones. For a more elaborate discussion of Michels on this front, see Beetham 1977.

Beyond Michels' elaboration of the relationship between organization and oligarchy, Michels also adopts Mosca's interpretation of class struggle and the need for "multiplicities" of elite groups to combat the plutocratic effects of representative government. Thanks to Mosca, Michels writes, we are encouraged to think of class struggle not in terms of progressive development between the minority and the majority; rather the "eternal struggle" really comes down to a "battle between an old minority… and a new and ambitious minority, intent upon the conquest of power, desiring either to fuse with the former or to dethrone and replace it" (Michels 1962, 342). But Mosca, Michels acknowledges, demonstrates that this battle need not imply entirely defeatist consequences, for at least within electoral institutions, this contestation of a corrupt, decaying elite group by an invigorated one "prevents the formation of a single gigantic oligarchy, [it results] merely in the creation of a number of smaller oligarchies, each of which is no less powerful within its own sphere"—an early iteration of what will become Dahl's polyarchy (Michel's 1962, 202).

As discussed in the previous chapter, Mosca insists on the need for "multiplicities" of elite groups in representative bodies. For Mosca, "the democratic impulse" attests to the replenishing of the ruling class with lower-class membership, whereas the circulation of power between minority groups constitutes "the liberal principle" (Mosca 1939, 145). Mosca claims that in representative government, power can be transferred in the autocratic way, where it is transmitted from the top down and the members of the ruling class are selected by inheritance or cooptation by those who are already in power. Alternatively, power can be transferred in "the liberal way," a method in which power is delegated by the governed to the governing classes by way of elections (145). The two systems, he says, "may be fused and balanced in various ways, as happens in representative governments today," where the president is chosen by the citizens and in turn has to power to appoint the officials of the federal government and the Supreme court magistrates (145). In contrast to these two methods, the "democratic impulse" creates genuine opportunities for lower classes to

swell the ranks of positions of leadership by means other than the electoral mechanism. In Mosca's vision, all three mechanisms can exist in popular government, but representative systems, without supplementation, do not facilitate the democratic impulse.

Michels deploys Mosca's thought here with a more concerted emphasis on the "prolonged struggle for dominion between [equal] factions within the party," and by implication, the competition between sects outside of the parties on the state level (Michels 1962, 369). The competition between elite factions *within and between* parties results in a seemingly proto-Schumpeterian conception of democracy: under electoral schemes, Michels writes, "the democratic system is reduced, in ultimate analysis, to the right of the masses, at state intervals, to choose masters to whom in the interim they owe unconditional obedience" (217).[10] The struggle between parties is not a struggle "of principle," he states, but "simply [one] of competition" (339).

Here Michels makes a crucial change to Mosca's doctrine. By adopting Mosca's focus on "multiplicities" of minority groups but eliminating the democratic institutional focus on elite contestation specifically *from below,* Michels amputates an important feature of Mosca's counter-oligarchic vision and his eventual defense of representative government. Mosca maintains that the "democratic impulse" underscores the need for integrating lower classes into government in some form beyond the mere exercise of their electoral power. Alternatively, Michels removes the focus on the majority's access to positions of leadership and replaces it with the contest between elite sects. Competition between elites, both Mosca and Michels argue, is endogenous to representative systems, which of course we can all admit is better than no competition at all. But Michels at times is willing to call this competition "democratic," whereas Mosca would have entirely rejected that label to describe elite circulation within representative politics.

[10] On the rehabilitation of Michels' theory of democracy understood as elite competition, see Beetham 1981, 94; Hands 1971, 171; Linz 2006, l.

Michels weaves two features of Mosca's thought (oligarchic organization and multiplicities of elites that liberal institutions engender) into his own theory of competition between elites in representative regimes. The competitive feature of the electoral system attracted many postwar political scientists to Michels' thought. Commentators would later argue that Michels honestly directs us, not just toward the silver lining of electoral organization as Mosca would have it, but to the essence of modern democratic politics.

To take one portentous example, John Day offered Michels as a theorist of "democratization" in a 1965 edition of the *American Political Science Review*. Day maintains that even though Michels proposes that "organization precludes democracy, and can destroy democracy," the most important feature of his thought attunes us to how organization can "facilitate democratization" (Day 1965, 418).[11] While Day admits that "Michels does not deal explicitly with the possibility that organization can facilitate the democratization of groups within society," he claims that the idea can be "inferred" because Michels proves that "increments of organization necessitate delegation and dispersal of authority" (421). In this respect, Day attributes "delegation" and "dispersal of authority" to Michels' account of democracy, not of representative government or electoral politics. Michels' theory, Day continues, might never bring about "the equalization of resources among members and the conformity of leaders' policies to followers' wishes," but it will result in the "mitigation of informal dictatorship," which is what democracy, for Day at least, must mean in the modern era (421; 422).

Ironically enough, during the immediate postwar period, political scientists treated Mosca and Pareto as irredeemable fascist theorists, but Michels as one who could be reconstructed for

[11] For a discussion of Mosca's influence on Michels as a theorist of "democratization," see Ferdinand Kolegar, "Elite and the Ruling Class: Pareto and Mosca Re-Examined," *The Review of Politics*, 29:3 (June 1967), 354-369, 364.

democratic purposes. Michels seemed to be a more attractive exponent of the Italian School of Elitism because his critique of electoral institutions does not assert the anti-democratic character of representative government in the same forceful way that the Italians articulated it. Not only did Mosca and Pareto avoid conflating modern democracy with election, but they believed that insisting upon the substantive difference between the two would inspire contestatory orientations toward existing elite rule and promote egalitarian outcomes. Similarly, Michels often states that representative institutions *only appear* to advance popular participation all the while actually perverting it, and he even adopts the Italians' hope that ruthless exposure will promote the asymptotic fulfillment of popular sovereignty. And yet, crucially, he does not distinguish between democracy and representation as thoroughly as his predecessors. In fact, Michels simultaneously brings to light the "myths of popular representations" that plagued Mosca and Pareto's thought while confusingly calling it "modern democracy" just the same (Michels 1962, 342):

> In modern day democracy it is held that no one may disobey the orders of the oligarchs, for in so doing the people sin against themselves defying their own will spontaneously transferred by them to their representatives, and thus infringing [upon] democratic principles. In democracies the leaders base their right to command on the democratic omnipotence of the masses…. In practice, however the election of leaders, and above all their re-election, is effected by such methods of coercion so powerful that the freedom of choice of the masses is considerably impaired (Michels 1962, 216-217).

Some political scientists, like Lipset, for example, admitted that representation was completely alien to Michels' conception of "applied democracy" (Lipset 1962, 34; Michels 1962, 73). But Michels exhibits fewer reservations concerning representation describing it as "modern day democracy," or "what we know as the era of democracy," thus prompting American political scientists to glean a

credible, new theory of democratic politics—one that fused electoral practices, representation and popular participation—based on Michels' thought (Michels 1962, 70).

Elites: "The Chiefs" and The Technical "Indispensability" of Leadership

Michels' transforms Mosca's key concerns over the plutocracy-elections nexus into a vision of "modern democracy" redefined as elite competition; as a result, many qualified, but still favorable attempts to appropriate *Sociology of the Party* for contemporary democracy appeared in the postwar Anglo-American world. Virtually all of these reconstructions eschewed Michels purported elitist disdain for mass incompetence, and they distanced themselves from the German thinker's unfortunate reliance on the "social psychological" propositions fashionable in his time (Cook 1971, 776; Lipset 1955). David Beetham argues that Michels' fascist sympathies can be linked at least partially to the prevalence of such theories in *Sociology of the Party* (Beetham 1977). Robert Nye's criticism of Michels' use of crowd psychology to denigrate masses or the mob is also cited regularly in the literature (Nye 1977). All such accounts link Pareto and Michels to crowd psychologist Gustave Le Bon, from whom both Pareto and Michels directly inherited their supposed disdain for mass epistemic capacities for politics (Drochon 2020, 187).

The relentless emphasis on Pareto and Michels' interest in crowd psychology and mass incompetence constitutes a strange habit among political scientists because both theorists primarily feared *elite* incompetence and incapacity for government. In *Sociology of the Party*, Michels continually accuses political leaders of engaging in deliberate and dishonest machinations to oppress the masses (Michels 1962, 142; 165; 310). More like Pareto than Mosca, Michels' critique exhibits an aggressive, rhetorical orientation toward existing elites. His vitriol for "the chiefs" is no less cutting than Pareto's, stressing that leaders sow disunion within the parties and betray democratic aspirations (164).

Even when party leaders start with the best intentions, Michels constantly enumerates the ways they that purposively confuse the masses in a way that does not indicate mass epistemic incapacity.[12] On the subject of simple voting, Michel states: "To justify the substitution of the indirect vote for the direct vote, the leaders invoke, in addition to political motives, the complicated structure of the party organization" (Michels 1962, 142). Even the referendum's disuse and ineffectiveness, he claims, is the fault of the leaders who undermine them: "it is easy for the chiefs to lead the masses astray by clever phrasing of the questions, and by preserving to themselves the right of interpretation in the case of replies which are ambiguous precisely because the questions have been ambiguously posed." In this case, the masses fully recognize as ambiguous the questions that they are being asked to answer, Michels says, because the questions were purposefully written to be deceptive (142, 165, 310). The "disunion" that subsequently ensues in the parties, therefore, "is almost always the work of leaders" (164).

Michels explicates another dimension of minority domination: he explains the reasons for political passivity among the masses and absolves the latter for adopting such an orientation (164). He complains that the chiefs ignore all "legal, logical, and economic bonds which unite the paid leaders to the paying masses"—thereby rejecting the age-old idea that leaders are held accountable through electoral competition (169). The masses, he continues, "are sulky, but never rebel for they lack power to punish the treachery of the chiefs" (169). Put differently, it is not that the majority are epistemically incapable of knowing that they are being exploited; rather their oppression and powerlessness inhibit them from doing anything about it. It is not a cognitive but rather a functional incapacity on their part.

[12] According to Linz, for Michels corruption is the result of the leader's "selfish purposes" despite their best intentions. Juan Jose Linz, *Robert Michels, political sociology, and the future of democracy* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2006), 40; 53.

Michels does not merely absolve the masses for their passivity in rhetorical asides. Besides charging elites with corruption and dishonesty, two crucial aspects of his argument undermine the unfavorable view of the masses that later interpreters attribute to him: he declares 1) that the chiefs are in no way genuine *aristoi*, or even intellectually superior to the crowd—the "reverence paid to leaders" is mostly an expression of "respect" rather than an estimation of their "true intellectual worth"; and 2) that the masses are not politically passive primarily because they are stupid, gullible, or incapable, but rather because their oppression makes them grateful to those "who speak and write on their behalf" (Michels 1962, 93; 92). This gratitude, for Michels, is decidedly not demonstrative of mass stupidity; it instead serves as an understandable palliative for their oppression—it offers them a semblance of hope amidst otherwise bleak prospects for emancipation. More importantly, in a world where "megalomaniacal" leaders desirous of flattery have the power to substantively alter their constituent's quality of life, Michels declares that mass gratitude bordering on cult veneration makes perfect sense (364). After all, the chiefs will distribute favors to the masses only if they are compensated with the "hero-worship" that in a rather "comical" sense such demagogues presume themselves to deserve (97). Michels suggests that while the masses may be somewhat complicit in their own subjection, this complicity certainly does not indicate any significant cognitive deficiency, nor does it make them responsible for it. They fawn over the emperor's absent clothing and hope for the best.

Contrary to how we remember Michels' text, *Sociology of the Party* does not merely seek to confirm early twentieth-century crowd psychology theories and apply them to the masses of the political sphere. Even Michels' references to Le Bon in no way validate the crowd psychology of the masses, but rather the psychology of leaders who become more delusional than members of a mob through their struggle for power. In fact, Michels only cites Le Bon approvingly in order to psychologize *leadership* and to explain how the leaders in modern popular governments, who begin

on equal footing with the masses, develop "autocratic" personalities as they become professional politicians (Michels 1962, 205; 364; 10).[13]

In fact, the guiding question of the work asks how leaders, who arise "spontaneously," and initially serve an "accessory" and "gratuitous" function become, over the course of time, "irremovable" (Michels 1962, 364). The bulk of the book deconstructs the psychology of leaders in a way that not only undermines assumptions of their formal superiority, but it also rationalizes the gratitude of the led in a way that does not indicate the latter's cognitive incapacity or responsibility for their own subjection.

Michels develops these two ideas (elite delusions of grandeur and resigned mass gratitude) consistently throughout the text, so much so that when he finally presents the "iron law of oligarchy" at the end of the book, they are built into his presentation of this so-called law:

> Now*, if we are to leave out* consideration of the tendency of the leaders to organize themselves and to consolidate their interests*, and if we leave out* of consideration the gratitude of the led towards the leaders, and the general immobility and the passivity of the masses, we are led to conclude that the principal cause of oligarchy in the democratic parties is to be found in the technical indispensability of leadership (Michels 1962, 365, *emphases added*).

While Michels concedes the existence of a certain passivity on the part of the masses, it sets in only after leadership has been consolidated and the led experience a modicum of gratitude, as if mass passivity is the direct result of these two phenomena. As a whole, *Sociology of the Party* develops the first two "considerations" (megalomania and gratitude) from the above-cited quote at the substantive expense of the third (passivity). It is both somewhat odd and perhaps telling that

[13] In Michels' words, "Le Bon writes with good reason: 'The leader has usually been at one time the led. He himself has been hypnotized by the idea of which he afterwards becomes the apostate" (Michels 1962, 205, referencing Le Bon's *Psychologie des Foules*).

Michels, in his explication of the iron law of oligarchy, asks the reader to set aside two critical considerations that his entire book accentuates: namely, how, exactly, leaders collude with each other despite their expressly conflicting political agendas, and how the masses' tend to express unwarranted gratitude for this so-called leadership. If we take the iron law of oligarchy at face value, then the technical indispensability of leadership, and hence oligarchy, can be granted only by "leaving out" the "considerations" that he says decisively affect organizational structure in modern society. The widespread contention that mass passivity—rather than elite corruption—was the major object of Michels' disdain constitutes a striking perversion of his actual sentiments and general attitude.

More than any other text, Seymour Martin Lipset's 1961 introduction to *Sociology of the Party* facilitated this perversion by refocusing Michels' critique away from elites and by ascribing positive normative assessments to Michels' account of oligarchy. Lipset contends that Michels chose to investigate socialist organizations only so that he could prove that even the most democratically leaning organizations are hypocritical, and "as such found it difficult to believe in any sustained democratic ideologies or movements, even as lesser evils" (Michels 1962, 32). As a result, Michels' "view of society and organization as divided between elites and followers," according to Lipset, "led Michels to accept the idea that the best government is an avowedly elitist system under the leadership of a charismatic leader" (32).

While Lipset may have anachronistically projected this view onto the early Michels because of the latter's eventual association with Italian Fascism, this is, at least according to the letter of *Political Parties*, completely inappropriate. Not only does Michels claim that "we must choose democracy as the least of evils" and demand that humanity "recognize the advantages which democracy, however imperfect, presents over aristocracy," but he also extols the virtues of democracy and its contribution to individual development and human flourishing (Michels 1962,

370; 369). In fact, Michels explicitly warns against understanding his text in the fashion that Lipset eventually would when he claims that he:

> does not wish to deny that every revolutionary working-class movement, and every movement sincerely inspired by the democratic spirit, may have a certain value as contributing to the enfeeblement of oligarchic tendencies…Democracy is a treasure which no one will ever discover by deliberate search. But in continuing our search…we shall preform work which will have fertile results in the democratic sense (Michels 1962, 368).

"The error of the socialists," Michels continues, lies in their "rosy optimism and immeasurable confidence regarding the future," but that does not mean that we must abandon the desperate enterprise of seeking the "treasure" of democracy that lies "buried" in the "bosom of the democratic working-class party" (368). For Michels the cynical orientation toward electoral procedures ought to encourage a focus on its two main panaceas: concentrated efforts improving lower-class "social education" and "economic" status so that the masses "may be enabled…to counteract the oligarchical tendencies of the working-class movement (369). At the time of writing his first book, Michels uses political pessimism in order to preserve the "treasure of democracy" in a way reminiscent of the Italians' efforts, as his theory seeks to equalize access to education and material wealth.[14]

Lipset ignores these efforts, or what I call the Italian disposition, which Michels explained more pointedly than any of his peers: the inclination to honestly expose the deficiencies of elite rule in order to encourage a greater striving for democracy and popular sovereignty (Michels 1962, 368).

[14] Hugo Drochon has recently explored the fact that *Sociology of the Party* ends on "a cheerier note, with Michels articulating how democracy will naturally give rise to two "palliatives" – an increase in education and competition between different oligarchies – something that has often been overlooked in the secondary literature…" Hugo Drochon, "Robert Michels and the Iron Law of Oligarchy and Dynamic Democracy," *Constellations* (June 2020), 185 – 198, 186.

On a basic level, to deny the influence of leaders, Michels writes, is "to strengthen the rule of the leaders, for it serves to conceal from the mass a danger which really threatens democracy" (72). He reminds us that "nothing but a serene and frank examination of the oligarchical dangers of democracy will enable us to minimize these dangers, even though they can never be entirely avoided" (370). Lipset commits the exact "error" against which Michels warns in his closing chapter—that is, reading the German immigrant to Italy's work as a justification to "abandon the desperate enterprise of endeavoring to discover a social order which will *render possible the complete realization* of the idea of popular sovereignty" (368, *emphasis added*). Despite the tragic plutocratic qualities of parliamentary regimes, Michels emphasizes that his efforts aim to "throw light upon certain…tendencies which oppose the reign of democracy" so that these tendencies can be better combated, not passively accepted as fait accompli (368).

Italian vs. German Pessimism: Michels and Weber

Mosca, Pareto, and Michels—also known as the "Modern Machiavellians"—offer biting critiques of elites, plutocracy, and oligarchy, frankly exposing elite domination so that democratic theory and practice might better control and contain it. They quite self-consciously employed a pessimistic disposition, but not because they were encouraging quietist acceptance of irresistible structures of hierarchical power. Rather, their pessimism is intended to motivate a kind of strategic vigilance against the plutocratic hierarchy that they diagnosed as pervading liberal governments—and, more generally, strategic vigilance against the continuous threat of democracy devolving into oligarchy as a result of the consolidation of leadership.

In recent years, Jeffrey Green derides contemporary liberal thinkers' "excessive sunniness…regarding the problem of plutocracy," and thereby revives a new variant of Italian pessimism (Green 2016, 84). Green too understands plutocracy as an integral component of liberal-

democratic states, and consequently argues that we not only ought to strive to "reduce plutocracy," but also develop strategies that "retrospectively respond" to it (84). I contend that adopting such a pessimistic disposition in itself constitutes one such retrospective response, for it serves as an offensive/defensive strategy against the liberal plutocratic nexus that Mosca, Pareto, Michels detail with refreshing honesty.

However, not all pessimistic dispositions are the same, or are directed toward identical ends. This difference in literary expression can already be seen in a comparison of Mosca and Pareto on the one hand and Michels on the other. For starters, Michels, a German in Italy, explicitly states the purpose of his pessimism in a way that his Italian counterparts would have never dreamed of admitting for fear of undermining the force of their own pessimism. Moreover, the Italian disdain for equating democracy and representative regimes does not translate into the German's political concerns. As the title of his book—"On the Sociology of the Party System in Modern Democracy"—suggests, for Michels the distinction between "modern democracy" and electoral institutions is a terminological issue. At the very least, for all intents and purposes modern democracy should be seen as distinct from the "applied democracy" of the past and, therefore, he says, the "frequent repetition of election is an elementary precaution on the part of democracy against the virus of oligarchy (Michels 1962, 71; 120).[15] Instead, for the Italians, the conflation of democracy and electoral regimes directly undermines the legitimacy and durability of popular government; the equation cannot be a matter of mere semantics because it raises unrealistic expectations of what elections, on their own, can achieve.

[15] Michels would later be criticized for offering "no sharp distinction" between party "democracy" understood as on the one hand "a party which aims at setting up, or supports, a democratic state government" and, on the other, "a party which has a democratic internal structure." As Gordon Hands demonstrates, Michels had both aims in mind and finds these definitions of democracy to be inextricably linked. Gordon Hands, "Roberto Michels and the study of political parties," *British Journal of Political Science*, 1:2 (1971), 155–172.

In addition, Michels' broad focus on oligarchy, as opposed to a localized critique of its specifically plutocratic strain, pushes more extreme conclusions that seem to border on encouraging resignation. Over the course of the prior two chapters, I have shown that despite the Italians' reputation for preferring abstract principles and generalizable political laws, both Mosca and Pareto, like Machiavelli, allow the reader "to breathe the fine dry air" of the Italian peninsula during the Risorgimento. Mosca's and Pareto's concentrated focus on the plutocratic challenge facing Italian parliamentarism suggests remedies that can be implemented to alleviate plutocratic corruption, at least if one is attuned to the environment in which the Italians were operating. Their pessimistic warnings, whether of the angry or sober variety, exhibit no fatalistic valence; they instead aim to inspire defensive strategies against such corruption and establish the unification of Italy on stronger popular, egalitarian—dare we say democratic—grounds. By contrast, Michels' more muted emphasis on plutocracy and his equation of electoral systems with "modern democracy" obfuscates the reforms to oligarchic domination that he poses at the end of the work, institutional or otherwise. Without the overt goal of attenuating plutocracy in the Italian post-unification process, the elements that encourage democratic reform seem less central in his analysis. Although Peter LaVenia makes an argument antithetical to the one presented here, he accurately maintains that "the use of Mosca's and Pareto's theoretical observations did not rank him as their follower, either" (LaVenia 2019, 126).

In the mid 1920's, Michels veers ever further from Pareto and Mosca's presuppositions about the constitution of a ruling class.[16] Unlike the Italians, Michels comes to believe that it is

[16] In 1925, Michels writes a second edition of *Sociology of the Party* in which he abandons focus on the two panaceas of representative government, instead highlighting the connection between plebiscitary politics and true democracy. It must be noted that the standard English translation of *Sociology of the Party* has always been the 1912 *Political Parties* edition (still the only English edition available), which means that it is highly improbable Anglo-American political scientists knew that Michels later made radical changes and amendments to his work.

impossible for ruling classes to be replaced in any case, that "absorption" is always a more accurate description of the process, and that even still, charismatic authority serves as the only authentic bridge between mass participation and political leadership in modern day polities.[17]

Given these differences between Italian and German expressions of political pessimism, Michels might have been more susceptible to abandoning the defensive postures of Mosca and Pareto, and therefore less wary of charismatic leadership manifesting itself into an autocratic regime-type. Although the conventional narrative suggests that Michels became a preeminent *fasciste* thinker by way of the Italian influence, it might just as well have been the case that his ultimate embrace of fascist ideology was prompted specifically by ideas of his real Doktorvater, Max Weber, who, unlike the Italians, presents plebiscitary democracy and executive authority based on personality in a far less critical fashion.[18] As Wolfgang Mommsen explains, over time—in fact, in 1925, the same exact time of Michels' conversion to fascism—Weber came to believe that the exogenous force of "'plebiscitarian democracy'…served as a counterweight to the bureaucratization of the apparatuses of power" (Mommsen, 1987, 132). This evolution from proponent of bureaucratization to skeptic of it led Weber to advocate a "plebiscitary democracy" in which a popularly elected, charismatic leader should be given substantial executive power to break out from the "iron cage of modernity," or in other terms, to escape the "iron clad law of oligarchy" (Green, 2010; Mommsen, 1981, 112–115).

[17] Roberto Michels, *First Lectures in Political Sociology*, ed. Alfred de Grazia (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1949), 75. Even in *Sociology of the Party*, Michels only accepts Mosca and Pareto's point about replacement with "considerable reserve" (Michels 1962, 182).

[18] For studies on Weber's and Michel's' relationship, see Francesco Tuccari, *Dilemmi della democrazia moderna: Max Weber e Robert Michels* (Bari: Laterza, 1993); Lawrence Scaff, Max Weber and Robert Michels, *The American Journal of Sociology*, 86:6 (1981), 1269–1286; Sandro Segre, "Notes and queries: On Weber's reception of Michels," *Max Weber Studies*, 2:1 (2001), 103–113.

Above all else, Mosca and Pareto feared invocations of charismatic authority as a legitimating justification for political rule; the point of their cynical approach toward the democratic possibilities of electoral institutions aimed to encourage reform of the plutocratic tendencies that might lead to authoritarian transformation, regardless of whether this transformation resulted in an autocratic, Byzantine, demagogic, or fascist form. As Stuart Hughes aptly put it, "there is a quaint justice in the fact that it was [Michels], the least original among the trio of neo-Machiavellians, who found Fascism the least troubling" (Stuart Hughes 1961, 272).

The historical records give us some speculative reasons to believe that Michels' defense of charismatic authority and foray into Italian Fascism displeased Mosca, who ultimately distanced himself from his brilliant German "pupil" (Kolegar 1967, 64).[19] In July of 1932, Michels wrote to Mosca proposing himself as the natural heir to Mosca's academic chair at the University of Rome.[20] After a long list of the reasons why he constitutes the obvious successor to carry on the Italian study of elitism, Michels enumerates the ways in which he has furthered Mosca's academic agenda and scientific methodology throughout the course of his career. Yet despite this nearly sycophantic praise, Mosca politely dismisses Michels' request of support and claims that he holds less power in the appointment process than Michels presumes—a clear slight to Michels, who knew, just like everyone else, that Mosca's vote would be decisive in selecting his successor.[21]

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[19] David Beetham marvels that Michels was able to maintain strong relations with both Mosca and Pareto and argues that although the Italian context pushed Michels towards fascism, Michels' thought can be distinguished "by his scientific categories" located in the "historical…experience of pre-world War Europe" (Beetham 1977).

[20] "Ma so una cosa, ed è che nessuno meglio di me sarà in grado di mantenere alta davanti alla scolaresca ed alla vita pubblica la fiamma del tuo pensiero scientifico." "Robert Michels a Gaetano Mosca," 1° luglio 1932, Busta 2/Sottofascicolo N 1/5, Corrispondenza Personale; Entrata M-V, Sottofascicolo N 68: Robert Michels, Documento 1, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Roma.

[21] "Fin d'ora però possa assicurati che l'influenza che tu credi che io possa esercitare (per conto tua) per la soluzione del cennato affare è per lo meno molto esagerato;" "Gaetano Mosca a Norberto

As Ettore Albertoni notes, "it was Michels himself who always referred to Mosca as one of his mentors"—and never the other way around (Albertoni 1987, 114). Mosca most certainly did not condone the way that Michels turns his critique of representative government and distrust for elites into a defense of Mussolini's dictatorship. It also seems to be the case that Mosca disapproved of the way that Michels deployed the pessimistic posture of the Italian School. Perhaps Mosca's and Pareto's pessimistic "tempo"—a style which seeks to constrain plutocracy through relentless criticism of elites—cannot be easily "translated" outside of the Italian context shaped by democratically inspired antagonism towards liberalism. Without this background, the tone in Michels' study of oligarchy may seem to encourage resignation to elite rule despite his initial explicit pronouncements to the contrary in *Sociology of the Party*.

In this sense, Michels pessimistic attitude drove Italian cynicism to the edge of fatalism. His analysis of the oligarchic elements of representative government and their relationship to democracy danced on the line between exposure of minority domination and insistence on its inevitability. But there are certainly far more types of pessimistic postures than the angry, sober, or nearly resigned ones described in the preceding chapters. As we shall see in what follows, Schumpeter shares an equally pessimistic attitude towards elites as his Italian and German forbears. But his sardonic irony exhibits a completely different tenor of distrust for elites, one that manifests itself in a different kind of disappointment in them and one that necessitates different prescriptions for confronting the problem that liberalism and representation poses to democracy.

Michels," Busta 2/Sottofascicolo N 1/5, Corrispondenza Personale; Entrata M-V, Sottofascicolo N 68: Robert Michels, Documento, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Roma.

PART II

SCHUMPETER'S DARE

A Critical Reading of *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* and its American Reception

Introduction

> To explode a myth is accordingly not to deny the facts but to reallocate them.
>
> —Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of the Mind*

Joseph Schumpeter's theory of competitive leadership, or what he calls "the alternate theory of democracy," remains the standard conception of democracy operating in the social sciences and even in popular discourse (Schmitter and Karl 1991; Gunnell 1993; Ricci 2015).

In contrast to the "classical theory of democracy," which posits elections as expressions of popular sovereignty or the will of the people, the alternate theory of competitive leadership defines democracy as "that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of competitive struggle for the people's vote" (Schumpeter 1942, 269). This definition, which emphasizes the decisive power of individual leaders, equates democracy with the procedures of competitive elections, in a way that minimizes or even dismisses the significance of mass political participation beyond the electoral choice. Proponents of this "realistic" or "elitist" definition of democracy put no stock in the normative or empirical dimensions of the public opinion or popular will that emerges in the public sphere; in the end, all that matters is that a competitive device, election, selects which elites should rule for a discrete time interval.

For this reason, Schumpeter has long been classified as the heir of the Italian School of Elitism and its conduit into American social science.[1] According to this standard genealogy, Schumpeter's incredulity over mass political agency combined with his reactionary anti-socialist and anti-democratic proclivities connects him to his supposedly fascist Italian precursors, Mosca, Pareto and Michels (März 19991, 58; Rappaport 1982). However, proponents of this view provide a significant qualification: they distinguish Schumpeter from the Italians on the basis of his allegedly more optimistic view of the elite competition that electoral procedure engenders. To the extent that Schumpeter at least retains the citizen's (or political consumer's) *choice* in the electoral process, his political economism and proceduralism constitutes a significantly more democratic, albeit still elitist, conception of democracy (Lewin 1980, 15). Consequently, on this interpretation, Schumpeter's orientation offers a more optimistic alternative to his Italian forbearers in that he attributes some redeeming, democratic qualities to liberal representative government despite his contempt for expansive mass participation.[2]

Against this interpretation, I argue that Schumpeter does not ultimately endorse the theory of competitive leadership that he (in)famously proffers in Part IV of *Capitalism, Socialism and*

[1] For a few iconic examples not treated in Chapter Seven, see Bert Hoselitz in Joseph Schumpeter, *Imperialism and Social Classes: Two Essays by Joseph Schumpeter* (Cleveland, Ohio: Meridian Publishing, 1955); Giovanni Sartori, *Democratic Theory* (New York: Frederick A Praegar Publishers, 1965); Harold Lasswell, "The Elite Concept" in *Political Elites in a Democracy*. ed. Peter Bachrach (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1971); Norberto Bobbio, *The Future of Democracy* (Minneapolis: Polity Press, 1987); John Medearis *Joseph Schumpeter's Two Theories of Democracy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Gerry Mackie, *Democracy Defended* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2003); David Reisman, *Democracy and Exchange: Schumpeter, Galbraith, T.H. Marshall, Titmuss and Adam Smith* (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2005).

[2] Both Bernard Manin (1997) and Nadia Urbinati (2006) demonstrate that the traditional expositors of representative democracy, from Rousseau to Mill, expected citizens to participate in ways that far exceeded the mere casting of votes. Instead, the alternate theory of competitive leadership reduces democratic participation exclusively to the moment of election.

Democracy. If readers engage the text in its entirety, they will become far less inclined to take the theory of competitive leadership seriously or to define democracy simply as fair and free elections. Although Part IV of the text has been interpreted as an imperative, when cast in relief with the rest of the book, the theory of competitive leadership reads as a dare: a provocation, primarily addressed to intellectual elites of all political inclinations, to publicly equate election and democracy even though Schumpeter demonstrates that the two are not equivalent. Schumpeter dares his readers to define democracy as election while simultaneously showing that such a change to democratic theory would constitute a dangerous, risky, and even foolish endeavor.

Much like Mosca and Pareto, albeit with far more sarcasm, Schumpeter's dare challenges elites to rewrite democratic theory in order to forestall looming authoritarian threats to liberal government because representative institutions do not currently fulfill democratic promises. Through the dare's sardonic irony, Schumpeter alerts elites to the problem of equating democracy with elections: settling for such a minimalist definition obscures the fact that to protect both their own position and the maintenance of liberal political institutions, elites must remain responsive to majoritarian values and desires, and furthermore that elections, on their own, cannot ensure this responsiveness and accountability.[3]

When read as a dare, the "alternate" theory of competitive leadership functions as a provocation to readers in three ways.[4] It encourages more sober elite recognition of 1) the political crisis facing Western liberal governments posed by Hitlerite Germany and Stalinist Russia, 2)

[3] Jan-Werner Müller calls Schumpeter "Weber's sardonic adversary" in *Contesting Democracy: Political Ideas in Twentieth Century Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 149.

[4] No less of a polemicist than Carl Schmitt remarked on Schumpeter's keen ability to caustically and playfully incite debate. Carl Schmitt, *Glossarium: Aufzeichnungen der Jahre* 1947-1951, ed. Eberhard Freiherr von Medem (Berlin: Duncker and Humblot, 1991), 101.

electoral institutions' inability to satisfy democratic demands, and, 3) the fact that popular opinion must somehow be heeded in order to defend liberal political practices (plurality of social life, formal political equality before the law, competitive elections, and the public practices of persuasion and moral deliberation) from authoritarian threats.

The point of the dare is thus to force intellectual and political elites to come face to face with the problem, as Schumpeter sees it—with the tension between liberal capitalism and an increasingly majoritarian desire for socialist economic arrangements—in order to push them to more self-consciously decide "what [they] will extol and what [they] will destroy."[5] Elites, he says, could accept the brazen dare to rewrite democratic theory along the suspect criteria of competitive leadership to save liberal capitalism, or they could acknowledge the truth of the historical tide toward socialism, and choose to work within a socialist economy and maintain and/or re-erect liberal political institutions within it. In either case, a more deliberate choice must be made lest an authoritarian demagogue (like Stalin) capitalize on the moment of the crisis of elite governance in the west.

In other words, Schumpeter dares his audience to rewrite democratic theory along the lines of the alternate theory of competitive leadership. Yet, as I will show, he never commits to that view himself because he finds both its theory and practice problematic. Through the dare, Schumpeter induces elite readers to acknowledge the democratic shortcomings of liberal capitalism and encourage them to take more self-conscious political action in their orientation to it. This is why, throughout *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, Schumpeter develops and presupposes a popular and transformative conception of democracy that is decidedly antithetical to the "minimal,"

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[5] "I have first to say that I am not running a drugstore. I have no pills to hand out; no clear-cut solutions for any practical problems that may arise. For these problems are largely political and *it is up to you to say what you want to do and to fight for it*, to say what you will extol and what you will destroy. The economist has no particular qualification to speak about that aspect of any subject. What he can do and what I want to do, to the best of my ability, is to present the problem…as I see it." (Schumpeter in a speech in Detroit, April 1941 *emphasis added*).

"proceduralist" one usually associated with his name and develops a robust account of popular agency (Chapter Four).

The reception of *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, and specifically, of Part IV of the book, shaped the development of postwar political science. I contend that American political scientists effectually accepted the dare as if it were a blueprint, while ignoring the warning about the problems that arise when democracy is reduced to its electoral dimension. Although Schumpeter, no less than the Italians, rejects the notion that democracy can be plausibly equated exclusively with elections, I will demonstrate how political scientists such as Robert Dahl, Peter Bachrach, Carol Pateman and Adam Przeworski used Schumpeter's thought to connect democracy with electoral procedures nonetheless (Chapter Five).

Why is this re-reading of Schumpeter's thought so pressing? For one, my revision of Schumpeter's enormously influential text robs the notion of democracy as competitive election of its founder and, therefore, undermines its legitimacy. If Schumpeter himself did not endorse a minimalist, procedural conception of democracy, then we might want to reconsider our own commitment to such a view based on his *actual* critique. At some level, when pressed, many political scientists admit elections to be a necessary but insufficient condition for democratic practice; yet nevertheless, the identification of democracy with fair and free elections reigns as the dominant heuristic paradigm. Instead of debating whether Schumpeter's alternative theory of democracy provides an adequate normative ideal, returning to the moment of its origin offers compelling reasons for entirely eliminating this theory as a viable way to classify democratic regimes. Recovering Schumpeter's critique of electoral institutions proves useful at a moment when political scientists are deeply dissatisfied with this theory of democracy yet are still unable to shake its ubiquitous influence.

My reconsideration of Schumpeter's view of the relationship between elites and masses also questions what ought to constitute a "realist" orientation to democratic politics. Schumpeter's irony

was intended to encourage elites to undertake inward reflection over their own governing capacities under the burdens of electoral institutions, rather than deflect (or project) their own lack of sound political judgment onto ordinary citizens. Once we read *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* as a dare, it makes little sense to equate a realist perspective with one that obsesses over the lack of mass participation or mass incompetence in liberal polities. Instead, Schumpeter's realism pushes us to acknowledge how little can be expected of elite political capacities when everything outside of elections is evacuated from the concept of democracy. Rather ironically, Schumpeter finds the equation of election and democracy to be empirically inaccurate and hopelessly unrealistic. His glib challenge underscores this point so that his elite readers might be compelled to take more self-conscious political action, as opposed to simply remaining complacent with their precarious rule under the electoral model.

Moreover, my revision highlights alternate paths for democratic theory—paths that were proposed by Schumpeter himself, but which were ultimately foreclosed by subsequent readers. Most of them, notably, Dahl, Bachrach, Pateman, and Przeworski, accepted the challenge without realizing that Schumpeter dared them to accept it without forsaking everything else he writes about how democracy operates under liberal capitalism. Reading the text as a dare elucidates how American political science could have taken a different orientation toward postwar democracy and democratic theory; it alerts us to the many ways that Schumpeter suggested it could have been otherwise. When the book is read in its entirety, it seems easier for elites to amend democratic practice—to govern more sensitively to democratic demands, and rely on extra-electoral institutions—rather than enact a wholesale and, to Schumpeter's mind, rather questionable revision of democratic theory.

Finally, my reading of *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* does not merely present a story of lost possibilities; it also traces the mis-reception of the so-called "elitist" or "realist" theorists of

democracy. Reading the text as a dare undermines the coherence of the category known as "democratic elitism" and therefore questions its value and use as a credible position in democratic theory. Disrupting the conventional genealogy that connects Mosca, Pareto, Michels and Schumpeter through a supposed aristocratic disdain for mass participation, or a procedure fetishizing knee-jerk defenses of liberal institutions, or a general "hatred of democracy" might inhibit the political scientists' tendency to group themselves along strict "elitist" versus "participatory," or "realist" versus "progressive" lines (Medearis 2020). The European theorists all employed extreme rhetorical pessimism, but returning to their actual, moderate orientations might provide renewed resources for developing more nuanced theories of representative democracy—theories untethered to the concept of popular sovereignty, but still more attentive to ways in which elections are paradoxically both necessary and destabilizing to democratic practice—without the ultimately empty "elitist," "realist," "participatory," or "progressive" labels.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE CHALLENGE
Realism and The Alternate Theory

> I think that most students of politics have by now come to accept the criticism leveled at the classical doctrine of democracy…I also think that most of them agree, *or will agree before long*, in accepting another theory which is much truer to life and at the same time salvages much of what sponsors of the democratic method really mean by this term.
>
> —Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*

From the beginning of the postwar period through the present moment, "realist" scholarship in political science discourse continually acknowledges its debt to Joseph Schumpeter. Anglophone and continental scholars consider him a progenitor of the modern realist movement and credit his *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* with formally initiating the proliferation of realist theories of democracy and even the so-called "empirical" or "behavioral" turn in political science (Held 1988; Katznelson and Kesselman 1987; Skinner 1973).

Schumpeter is considered a realist on three distinct planes of democratic theory. As a paradigmatic realist, it is argued, Schumpeter: 1) gives no credence to the reality of public opinion and, a fortiori, no reason to believe in the "people's will" (Brooker 2005; Ober 2018; Mackie 2009); 2) advances a minimal, procedural conception of democracy as an adequate barometer for understanding how democracy operates in modern mass government (Mayo 1960; Macpherson 1977; Shapiro 1994; Thomas 2018); and 3) offers proceduralism as a sufficient condition for classifying political typologies, since proceduralism allows democracy to be distinguished from other regime types along empirical, and non-normative, conditions (Lipset 1959; Dahl 1963; Plamenatz 1958; Aron 1950).

Given Schumpeter's importance within contemporary realist democratic theory, this chapter offers a reconsideration of *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* in relation to this literature. Schumpeter's realism, I contend, is misunderstood because Schumpeter actually rejects each of the above stated claims. In the following discussion, I deconstruct each component of the "alternate model" of competitive leadership (the procedural form that has become known as his more realistic alternative to classical participatory models of popular sovereignty) in order to show how Schumpeter's conception of democracy self-consciously undermines the electorally-centric theory of democracy associated with his name.

Aside from the infamous Part IV, in every other part of the book, 1) Schumpeter offers a more comprehensive, participation-based theory of democracy as a practicable vehicle for transformative politics (a model of democracy that cannot be reduced to mere procedure); 2) he elaborates a precise and powerful conception of popular agency, very much at odds with his often cited proposition that the "people's will" does not exist; 3) he argues that the theory of competitive leadership applies to democratic procedures strictly under the rules of liberal capitalism, but that it should not be considered a normative or even descriptive model for democracy generally understood; and, finally, 4) he criticizes the uncompetitive, plebiscitary quality of elections generated under liberal capitalism and prescribes significant supplemental criteria that would make elections function more effectively.

If, as I contend, Schumpeter develops a conception of democracy antithetical to the alternate theory of competitive leadership, then what is the purpose of him explicitly proposing the alternate model in Part IV? Contrary to how he defines democracy in the preceding sections, I maintain, in Part IV Schumpeter provokes *his reader* to redefine democracy as a narrow procedural form of competitive elections with drastic implications for the ways in which his conception of democracy and realism should be interpreted.

Schumpeter describes this redefinition of democracy as difficult to accomplish, foolhardy, and rather unlikely, that is, as a dare, because he undermines at every turn each component of his "elitist" or "realistic" alternative to "classical" participatory democratic theory. In so doing, I argue, he inoculates his own comprehensive view of democracy from precisely the one that he dares contemporary elites to take up. While he dares elites to do something that could be politically expedient, if successfully carried out, he maintains his own intellectual integrity by adhering to something empirically accurate and normatively rich—that is, something more true to how he demonstrates democracy has historically operated despite the formal confines of liberal institutions. In fact, Schumpeter's own conception of democracy, explicated outside of Part IV, is one far more "realistic" than is the alternate theory of competitive leadership.

In proposing the theory of competitive leadership to his readers, Schumpeter sardonically dares intellectual elites to rewrite democratic theory in order to stave off the imminent mass rejection of liberal capitalism. He does so in an overtly sarcastic fashion and with marked reluctance to define democratic theory that way himself because the alternate theory, and the liberal capitalist political practice that matches it, is, in his view, unsustainable without substantial and even unrealistic supplementation. Through the use of sarcasm, Schumpeter presses elites to acknowledge the unsustainability of exclusive reliance on electoral institutions—institutions that he identifies as inherently flawed aspects of liberal capitalism insofar as they place elites under enormous pressure to govern in ways that they are ill-equipped to carry out.

As I will show, the rhetorical force of the dare created enough conceptual indeterminacy that Schumpeter could use the alternate theory to both describe how elections actually operate under the formal rules of liberal capitalism and also entice readers to explicitly redefine democracy on the basis of these admittedly unstable grounds. By uncritically accepting his challenge to rewrite democratic theory according to the theory of competitive leadership—that is, by focusing exclusively on Part IV

of the book—American political science, as we will see, ignored Schumpeter's ambivalence and embraced the sort of democratic "realism" whose problems he attempted to accentuate and perhaps resolve. Overlooking the performative function of the dare, political scientists proceeded to "prove" the empirical validity of the alternate theory that Schumpeter himself found *prima facie* unconvincing.

When these elements are incorporated into his political thought as a whole, scholars may want to reconsider, on the one hand, what elements precisely ought to constitute a genuinely "realist" approach to democratic theory, as well as, on the other, whether Schumpeter ought to be included among authors who are thought to comprise the realist legacy at all. [1]

Setting the Problem: The Instructions

Part IV contains Schumpeter's critique of the "classical democratic doctrine" and the proposal for replacing it with "another" doctrine—the theory of competitive leadership. Unlike the classical doctrine, which identifies democracy and election based on the way that elections express the will of the people, the alternate theory focuses exclusively on the selection of rulers based on a competitive principle. In this part, Schumpeter's infamous realism shines through: he pessimistically describes the ways that liberal capitalism creates an environment in which elites compete for political rule among themselves and then dishonestly call this system "democracy," as if parliamentary and representative institutions expressed popular sovereignty in a meaningful way. He portrays the "classical" theory, i.e., the idea that elections are a direct expression of the people's will, as an elite ruse that elides the difference between electoral and legislative power and thus inhibits even a modicum of popular control and elite accountability once the electoral moment has passed. By

[1] For a parallel reconsideration of Max Weber's purported "realism," see Stefan Eich and Adam Tooze, "The Allure of Dark Times: Weber, Politics and The Crisis of Historicism," *History and Theory* 56, no. 2 (2017): 197-215.

stressing the ways that "classical" democratic theory does not match the practice of electoral politics, Schumpeter reveals the facticity of elite domination and the illusory democratic dimension of modern representative governments.

The problem with this ruse, according to Schumpeter, is that its lack of credibility has become too apparent. The distance between liberal capitalist institutions and democratic ideals renders adherence to electoral politics unconvincing and unappealing even to the most committed adherents of capitalism and liberal-democracy—the bourgeoisie (Schumpeter 1942, 161). As an antidote to this incoherent and historically fraught theory, Part IV offers an abstract, theoretical proposal that promotes democracy as a mere method, an institutional arrangement for arriving at legislative and administrative decisions exclusively through competitive elections (242). His presentation revolves around seemingly basic definitions in order to more easily decouple norms that have been associated with democracy historically such as liberty, freedom, human dignity, or even socialism.

The preliminary argument is proposed as follows: the first proposition is to deny that socialism and democracy are necessarily connected not simply based on the historical record of socialist parties, but more critically on the "inconclusive" premises of the Marxian doctrine (Schumpeter 1942, 236). The next step consists of a "mental experiment" relying on a hypothetical example of democratically organized religious persecution and its distaste among self-proclaimed democratic nations. Schumpeter offers this hypothetical construct in order to argue that allegiance to democracy is only maintained when it is believed that democracy will guarantee interests and ideals that are more highly esteemed by a particular polity—be that equality, fraternity, or freedom of speech (240). Lastly, Schumpeter deconstructs the etymology of democracy—that is, the etymology of its two component parts "people" and "rule"—in order to establish the volatility of these categories and explain how this volatility creates insufficient conditions for any value-based

conception of democracy (243). Schumpeter thus 'sets the problem' by introducing three specific premises and making deductions based upon them so that the procedural essence of democracy comes more forcefully into view.

These premises contain Schumpeter's instructions, as it were, or the way he calls his readers to pursue the redefinition of democracy he will later propose, *all the while* undermining its validity. This preliminary section offers a set of guidelines for how to make a compelling case for the alternate, procedural theory of democracy as competitive elections while simultaneously dissociating it from his own approach. It proposes a way for others to "set the problem" that would make the alternate theory more attractive. A reconsideration of these premises is in order.

The first thing one would do, hypothetically speaking, in order to more plausibly redefine democracy as election is to destroy any link between socialism and democracy in intellectual and popular discourse. In this way, Schumpeter proposes to intellectual elite readers that they disconnect institutional mechanisms from substantive socio-economic outcomes, ironically, by following the example of socialist intellectuals since Marx. "Socialism in being might be the very ideal of democracy. But socialists are not always so particular about the way in which is to be brought into being," Schumpeter writes (Schumpeter 1942, 237). Along these lines, he suggests separating democratic procedures and substantive democratic outcomes not simply on the basis of the "checkered" democratic history of socialist parties, but more critically, on the possibility that Marx "might have put socialism above the observance of democratic procedure" despite claims to the contrary in *The Communist Manifesto* (Schumpeter 1942, 236*)*. He sarcastically attributes this idea to Marxism's "true scribes and Pharisees," i.e., socialists after Marx (236).[2]

[2] The decoupling of socialism and democracy in Part IV is more jarring if one has read Part I, where Schumpeter conclusively affirms their connection (Schumpeter 1942, 58).

Schumpeter intimates the following: if socialist elites after Marx, the most full-throated advocates of substantive democracy, are willing to sacrifice democratic procedures to achieve material ends, why should liberal elites continue to insist upon some type of procedural and substantive coherence in democratic polities? Those invested in defending liberal capitalism should follow suit, he suggests; they, too, could engage in the intellectual exercise of separating democratic procedure from substantive material democratic outcomes. Socialists after Marx have in fact given them the precedent for doing so: this separation enables defenders of liberal capitalism to more convincingly privilege the procedure, and, incidentally, it affords them the ability to distance socialism from democracy, more generally, in the popular imaginary.

Schumpeter's first premise sardonically goes about "setting the problem" by emphasizing what Marxists after Marx said about the ostensibly necessary but actually weak connection between socialism and democracy, the fact that socialists after Marx were willing to forsake procedural democracy, even though, according to the letter of the Marxian "law," a socialist economy normatively and practically requires democratic procedures to be instantiated (Schumpeter 1942, 236). The tone is palpably sardonic not just because he slights socialists after Marx— "the true scribes and Pharisees"—but primarily because Schumpeter cites the passages where Marx inherently links socialism and democracy to expose the socialist scribes and Pharisees as hypocrites.[3]

In this apparent attempt to decouple socialism and democracy, Schumpeter dissociates himself from this first step of "setting the problem." Schumpeter reveals that, unlike both the socialist Pharisees and those liberal elites who might undertake defending a procedural conception

[3] As Richard Ashcraft notes, Schumpeter's "contextual linkage between socialism and democracy—long since severed by virtually all of the political scientists who have written about 'modern democracy'—must be characterized as one of the many historical ironies…with which readers…must come to terms." Richard Ashcraft, "Schumpeter and Democracy," at *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*: A Fifty-Year Retrospective, Center for Social Theory and Comparative History, 1 February 1993, UCLA.

of democracy, he is unwilling to distinguish between democracy understood as a procedure from democracy defined in terms of its substantive aims:

> …any argument in favor of shelving democracy for the transitional period affords an excellent opportunity to evade all responsibility for [suspending democracy]. Such provisional arguments may well last for a century or more and means are available for a ruling group installed by a victorious revolution to prolong them indefinitely *or to adopt the forms of democracy without the substance*. (Schumpeter 1942, 237 emphasis added).

Just a few chapters before Schumpeter suggests that readers identify democracy as nothing more than a procedural mechanism with the alternate theory of competitive leadership, he acknowledges that implementing a procedural form of democracy can quite easily empty it of its "substance"—and, in this context, to its detriment. Here Schumpeter effectively declares that, to his mind, democracy cannot simply be understood as a procedure if it is to maintain its integrity or value; that you can easily have a democratic form without any of the substance (Schumpeter 1942, 237).

In this step of "setting the problem," Schumpeter admits that democracy cannot be identified procedurally, but he proposes that other readers do so, anyway. He thus inoculates his view from the procedural one he will propose, but despite this admission, Schumpeter would later be almost exclusively cast as a proceduralist; continually castigated for reducing democracy to a sterile procedure "devoid of the distinctive moral function of democratic politics and government" (Davis 1964, 37; Lichtman 1969; Runciman 2007).

In order to make a case for a procedural redefinition of democracy, besides separating democracy from socialism, one would also, hypothetically speaking, have to contrast it with a different, and less attractive procedural definition. Therefore, the next step in "setting the problem" consists of a "mental experiment" relying on a hypothetical example of democratically organized religious persecution and distaste for such persecution prevailing within self-proclaimed democratic

nations. Schumpeter offers this hypothetical construct in order to argue that allegiance to democracy understood strictly as a procedure of *majority rule* is only maintained when it is believed that democracy will guarantee interests and ideals that are more highly esteemed by a particular polity—be that equality, fraternity, justice, or freedom of speech (Schumpeter 1942, 240).

Later commentators would complain that Schumpeter fatally "missed" the fact that such majoritarian persecution would necessarily conflict with the rules of any truly democratic regime, since a sufficiently democratic system requires freedom of discussion and association that are severely compromised in cases of persecution (Pateman 1970, 4; Miller 1983, 137; Plamenatz 1973, 96; Macpherson 1977, 85).[4] Yet Schumpeter here qualifies his argument: the question is not whether we would approve of such persecution on the grounds of a democratic procedure understood as majority rule; obviously we would not, he says explicitly (Schumpeter 1942, 242). Instead, he asks whether we would accept a *constitution* that would "approve of such results in preference to a non-democratic one that would avoid them?" (242). In other words, he asks his reader to make a specific, constrained choice: whether she would prefer a constitution containing a conception of procedural democracy understood strictly as majority-rule, or a non-democratic one that avoids the dangers of something like systematic religious persecution.

As other critics would notice, through this question Schumpeter narrowed the procedural meaning of democracy in order to underscore the fact that, owing to its own inherent nature, democracy is constantly in danger of violating its own principles (Bachrach [1967] 1980, 20). Given this danger, Schumpeter wryly asks us to question the nature of our commitment to a constitution which privileges majority rule over another procedural approach—a more open-ended but less

[4] See Chapter Seven for how Bachrach and Pateman responded to this passage.

democratic option that privileges other ideals and interests such as "justice, decent government, and so on…" (Schumpeter 1942, 242).

Here Schumpeter first introduces the idea of understanding democracy simply as a method, and not an end it-and-of itself. Immediately, again, however, he offers another qualification:

> It might be objected that as a matter of logic a method as such can be an absolute ideal or ultimate value. It can. No doubt one might conceivably hold that, however criminal or stupid the thing that democratic procedure may strive to accomplish in a given historical pattern the will of the people must prevail... But it seems much more natural in such cases to speak of the rabble instead of the people and to fight its criminality or stupidity by all the means at one's command (Schumpeter 1942, 242).

The mental experiment that Schumpeter proposes to question our commitment to democracy *conceived as majority rule* ends with a concession about its feasibility, along with the age-old warning about the perils of rule by the rabble, and not the people, when democracy is conceived as such. To put it somewhat differently, when democracy is defined as majority rule, the rabble—and not the people—necessarily emerge out of a polity. Such a result, he says, must be combatted at all costs—even at the cost of propagating other types of democratic institutional measures.

In this step of "setting the problem," Schumpeter says that no one would commit to democracy as a value in and of itself when democracy is conceived procedurally as majority rule. This idea is distinct from the view that democracy writ large only constitutes a means and not an end, as many interpreters later understood these passages.[5] In effect, the way to rewrite "democratic"

[5] Twentieth century democratization literature took this passage to justify democracy's instrumental value. See Ian Shapiro *Democracy's Place*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), xi. See also Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the late Twentieth Century*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 6-7 and Giuseppe Di Palma, *To Craft Democracy: An Essay on Democratic Transitions*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 23; 28; 109.

theory along the lines of liberal practice, Schumpeter intimates, would be to "polemically" set-up a choice between a patently non-democratic procedural option and the procedural strawman of majority rule (Medearis 2001, 129).

And finally, the most important thing one must do to reduce democracy to election is to utilize the capaciousness of the concept against itself. The last step in "setting the problem" therefore requires deconstructing the etymology of democracy—that is, the etymology of its two component parts "people" (*demos*) and "rule" (*kratein*)—in order to establish the volatility of these categories and explain how this volatility creates insufficient conditions for any value-based conception of democracy (Schumpeter 1942, 243). Who are the people, anyway? Schumpeter petulantly asks. Should heretics be barred from political participation in religious, democratically organized societies, in the same way secular societies exclude lunatics? (246). Should not every "*populus"* define itself based on its own criteria (246)? And what about such a capacious concept as "rule" (246)? Even monarchs, dictators and oligarchs can never rule completely, since, he says sarcastically, they are always "subject to the data of the national situation"—i.e., different constraining circumstances, their ability to "[get] along with others," etc. (246).

In comparison to other regimes, Schumpeter writes in response to his own rhetorical questions, democracy poses an especially tricky problem. Direct democracy aside, he claims, there are innumerable permutations of potential forms of government in which the "people" may participate in "ruling" (Schumpeter 1942, 246). Yet no single one of these permutations has an exclusive or obvious title to being called "Government by the People" (246). If any of them "acquire[s] such a title," he says prefiguring his eventual dare, they can do so "only by virtue of an arbitrary convention defining the meaning to be attached to the term 'to rule.' Such a convention is always possible of course: The people never actually rule but they can always be made to do so by definition" (246).

The current conventions and definitions on offer, Schumpeter continues, have failed to adequately cover up the fact that liberalism (i.e., representative, electoral government) and democracy are irreconcilable because representative government originates in theories of divine right (Schumpeter 1942, 246). The seventeenth and eighteenth century "theories" tried to link representative forms of government to the idea of the "Rule by the People" with preposterous fairy tales of social contracts or clumsy legal constructs and postulates, but failed miserably to develop any semblance of a coherent theory that could connect forms of representative government, whether real or ideal, with a plausible mechanism by which the people meaningfully rule (246).

In microcosm, this discussion functions in the manner characteristic of the entire first chapter. First, it concedes that democracy can take a variety of institutional forms that may all plausibly constitute a government by the people, and that no single procedural form can necessarily endow democracy with substantive meaning. As we observed above, the form of democracy can in some cases even empty it of "its substance." Through this very concession, however, Schumpeter undermines Enlightenment attempts to connect government by the people with representative forms, thereby establishing the premise on which the "Classical Democratic Doctrine" will be attacked. Additionally, it foreshadows what Schumpeter asks his readers to do in his proposal for "Another Theory": he suggests redefining democracy based on an "arbitrary convention" which defines popular "rule" only by measuring popular participation at the moment of election.

Through qualification, "Setting the Problem" distances Schumpeter's view from the other theory that he will later propose, but simultaneously delineates how, strategically, one would more plausibly go about undertaking the redefinition of democracy that he later suggests other

intellectuals to take up.[6] The first thing to be done by those who would attempt to rewrite democratic theory, he says mockingly, is to decouple socialism and democracy based on the deficient claims of socialists *after* Marx, while at the same time acknowledging a) that he is not willing to understand socialism that way himself, and b) that he believes privileging the form of democracy can rob it of its actual substance.[7] Next, Schumpeter proposes utilizing a "mental experiment," which temporarily reduces the procedural definition of democracy to majority rule, conjures the fear of the rabble associated with this conception, and then questions the constitutional commitment to procedural democracy understood as such.[8] And finally, Schumpeter sarcastically uses the institutional flexibility of a substantively democratic polity against itself, thereby highlighting the fact that there is no singular procedural form that grants democracy material value, but also proposing that others redefine it on such a formally narrow institutional basis.

The Definition of Democracy: Abstract Theory vs. Transformative Ideal

To a significant extent, then, "Setting the Problem" engages in a rhetorical sleight of hand: before introducing his critique of the classical democratic doctrine and his proposal for an alternative theory, Schumpeter sets up the problem by distancing himself from the very procedural definition he subsequently proposes, seriously qualifying that definition's validity; however, he also invites, even impels, others to pursue this line of thinking. In effect, he summons his readers with

[6] Scholars have characterized what I am describing merely as a "tension," and not as a part of the function of the text. See" Laurence O'Toole Jr., "Schumpeter's 'Democracy,'" *Polity* 4 no. 9 (Summer 1977): 446-462, 460.

[7] See Chapter Five for how Analytic Marxists, typified by Adam Przeworski, followed this first "instruction."

[8] See Chapter Five for how participatory democrats, typified by Carol Pateman, pursued this second "instruction."

the three specific premises discussed above so that the case for the procedural essence of democracy, understood as an institutional arrangement for the competition of votes as opposed to majority-rule, can eventually be made more plausible than it would be otherwise—at least according to Schumpeter's own analysis. Indeed, the summons, issued through these specific guidelines, were actually taken up by political scientists who thereafter sought to empirically "prove" each of these three components in the service of reducing democracy to an electoral procedure.[9]

However, the abstract, deductively derived nature of these premises and the mechanistic quality of the alternate theory veil a more comprehensive conception of democracy that Schumpeter presents throughout the text, and they additionally obscure the historical and sociological dimensions of Schumpeter's broader argument.[10] Along with the procedural definition that he proposes others to adopt in Part IV, Schumpeter throughout the book develops a theory that conceptualizes democracy as a historically and sociologically transformative force. Aside from John Medearis, virtually all commentators have focused on the procedural theory at the expense of the more historically-sociologically expansive—and more textually pervasive—conception of

[9] In his prefatory remarks, Anthony Downs wrote that his theory democracy was indebted to Schumpeter in his prefatory remarks; yet he failed to cite Schumpeter once in the body of his text. Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy,* 1957). See also Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man*, University Press, 1960), 2 and Mancur Olsen, *The Logic of Collective Action*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), 109-110; 161. In the second edition of *The Civic Culture*, Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba defend their work against accusations that they "celebrated the stabilizing effects of political apathy on democracy" by identifying the text as one that "describes the mood" of Joseph Schumpeter (Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba: *The Civic Culture* (California: Sage Publications, 1989), v-vi. More recently Christopher Achen and Larry Bartels have leaned on Schumpeter as a progenitor of the skeptical view that they are seeking to revive in *Democracy for Realists* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

[10] Commentators have noted the mechanical tone of Part IV in contrast to the other parts of the text, but merely characterize this tone as "aberrational." See Ashcraft 1999, 1.

democracy.[11] Throughout the text, Schumpeter explicitly offers a critique of the theory of competitive leadership proffered in Part IV of the work—that is, he shows us why the alterative theory is an impoverished one through his presentation of democracy as a historically transformative force. In this sense, Schumpeter offers a type of auto-critique of the alternate theory through his competing conception of democracy developed throughout the text.[12]

Schumpeter even admits that he develops a conception of democracy deeply antithetical to the alternate theory. He confesses that despite his insistence on its procedural essence in Part IV, democracy is "actually" something that "from another standpoint" he considered to be "incapable of becoming, viz., an ideal or rather a part of an ideal schema of things" (Schumpeter 1942, 266). When democracy becomes associated with developments that are overwhelmingly approved by large majorities, he states, it "ceases to be a mere method that can be discussed rationally like a steam engine or a disinfectant" (266). In other words, while from the technical "standpoint" democracy can theoretically be conceived as method for arriving at political decisions, history has made it, in "actuality," something transcending what this mere technical definition can possibly convey. Democracy has been elevated to the status of an "ethical maxim" because it has been associated with developments that people use to construct their "valuation schemata" (266). Schumpeter thus concedes that despite his effort to reduce the definition to a method, his procedural account offers

[11] Building on Medearis' thought, I develop the view of democracy as a transformative ideal in the service of illuminating Schumpeter's dare. Situating the transformative theory of democracy in light of the text's performative function, I hope, better reconciles his seemingly competing "two theories." John Medearis, *Joseph Schumpeter's Two Theories of Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

[12] The identification of Schumpeter with the deflationary redefinition of democracy as an electoral institutional mechanism at the expense of his other theory is so pervasive that in contemporary scholarship, he is seen to codify this "Cold War trend." Kyong-Min Son, "A Discordant Universe of Pluralisms: Response to Wenmen," *Political Theory*, 43 no. 4 (2015): 533-540, 537.

an incomplete conception of democracy—and one antithetical to how he develops "democracy" elsewhere in the work.

This concession is often disregarded for two reasons. Most notably, the notion of democracy as an ethical postulate maintains relatively low-profile within the scope of the technical argument presented in Part IV. In this context, Schumpeter states that democracy has acquired the status of an end-in-itself in order to explain precisely why the classical doctrine of democracy has gained so much traction—and not to explicitly incorporate this element into his proposal for its redefinition. Since he merely admits it in this context with little emphasis or elaboration, it does not acquire the same prominent status as the mechanical definition of democracy advanced by Part IV. As such, interpreters often conclude that Schumpeter only mentions this element of democracy in order to insist upon its far more important procedural nature.[13]

Secondly, Schumpeter describes democracy as an agent of transformation not in the discussion explicitly devoted to the alternate theoretical framework for democracy, but rather in the proceeding and succeeding sections of the work. Contrary to what his "Schumpeterian" legacy suggests, throughout his career Schumpeter was always more interested in analyzing how ideas and ideologies—and not the exploits of "supra-normal" individuals—serve as crucial vehicles for social and economic change.[14] The preceding three parts of the book are dedicated to the sociological and

[13] Those who identify competing tendencies in his political thought usually insist that Schumpeter viewed the non-procedural elements as mere "noise," or exceptions that proved his most important rule. See, for example, Tom Bottomore, *Between Marxism and Marginalism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992).

[14] Schumpeter's thought has been characterized as a glorification of elite capacities against his critique of mass epistemic ones. Despite some qualification, C. Wright Mills first gave expression to this portrayal in *The Power Elite* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), 96. The view persists even today in that "Schumpeterian" often signifies a celebration of "supernormal" or "superhuman" elite aptitudes. For a contemporary iteration of Mills' characterization, see Corey Robin, *The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Donald Trump*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 150-160.

historical conditions that made particular ideas like Marxism, socialism, capitalism, and democracy such socially and economically transformative forces.[15] In fact, most of *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* is characterized by a historical and sociological inquiry into the way ideas change social and economic structures.

But this is not all. The very *idea* of democracy in fact maintains a privileged position in the work (Schumpeter 1942, 122). Although more attention is given to the conditions undergirding the advent of Marxism, capitalism, and socialism, Schumpeter identifies democracy as the most crucial ideology in the transformation, or "rationalization," of society. As many have noted, Schumpeter follows Weber and Manheim in underscoring the rationalizing tendencies unleashed in the transition from traditional feudal structures to liberal capitalism (Schumpeter 1942, 211; Blockland 2006). The unique contribution of Schumpeter's analysis, however, lies in singling out democratization as the most historically significant form of rationalization that geared this change—and the change that continues to gear institutions toward socialist arrangements. He contends that democratic ideology—that is, the broad idea of some form of popular participation in or control of government as a legitimizing factor—was the constitutive component of liberal capitalism: the very idea of democracy, epitomized through the call for universal suffrage, "presided over the process of political and institutional change by which the bourgeoisie reshaped, and from its own point of view rationalized, the social and political structure that preceded its ascendancy" (297).[16] As a result,

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[15] On Schumpeter's methodological orientation cast in light of his position on *Methodenstreit*, see Richard Swedberg, *Schumpeter: A Biography*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

[16] In Part IV, Schumpeter argues that the democratic method (electoral government) demonstrated the transformative power of democracy historically, in that the procedural method allowed for increased participation in government through constant expansion of universal suffrage. In other words, election constituted one procedural mechanism by which we can trace the transformative potential of democracy, but this is not say that Schumpeter believes democracy should be considered tantamount to election.

democracy became the idea that enabled people to rise against and "eventually prevail" over governments that "were obviously in a state of decay and had become bywords of incompetence, brutality and corruption (249)." Historical developments, he maintains, helped create a situation in which "*action* continued to be taken" specifically in the name of the democratic—and not the capitalist or the socialist—ideal (249 emphasis added). [17]

Schumpeter therefore pinpoints the idea of democracy as the historical tendency that transformed social and political structures in the west. Thus, even in Part IV, his account of democracy is not limited to the narrow view of its mechanical function; he explicitly says and even shows democracy to be far more than what the abstract, theoretical definition connotes. Moreover, the historical account of the power of the democratic ideal in reshaping social and political institutions undermines the claim that individual elites are in any way exclusively responsible for shaping these structures. Schumpeter identifies democracy as the catalyst that enabled full-scale transformation in a way that is more authoritative than the particular agency of the individual politicians, intellectuals, and entrepreneurs that he supposedly venerates as "supra-normal" men in Part IV.

Critics who acknowledge the conception of democracy as a socially altering, normative ideal in Schumpeter's thought could argue that he still credits individual politicians and intellectuals with the creation of the democratic ideology, thereby further reinforcing his elite characterization of

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[17] In articulating his transformative ideal, Schumpeter rejects the idea, first posited by Moisey Ostrogorsky and Carl Schmitt and later taken up by Jurgen Habermas, that mass party democracy is structurally distinct from nineteenth century liberal parliamentarism. For Schumpeter, it seems, Ostrogorsky and Schmitt exaggerated the distinction and missed the broader point: democracy, in its most comprehensive form, is a transformative ideal that allows for people to contest corrupt governments in the state of decay through some form of popular participation or control, whichever instantiation those governments may take in any given historical moment.

democracy. Indeed, Schumpeter's disparaging remarks about the cognitive deficiency of the mass electorate in this section of the text seems to reinforce this characterization (Schumpeter 1942, 257; 309; 330).[18] Nevertheless, Schumpeter's historical and sociological analysis reveals that he in no way believes that social transformation is generated from the top down. The examples he selects to track his narrative of the evolution from traditional feudalism to liberal capitalism to democratic socialism are quite varied and suggest that social and political transformation through the spread of democratization occurs unevenly and from multiple directions. This uneven and variegated transformation in fact constitutes the defining component of what demarcates change through democratization as opposed to other socially and economically transformative forces.

Schumpeter recognizes that the reigning intelligentsia and ruling politicians could use democracy as a tool for advancing liberal capitalism only because it corresponded with the "habits" and "values" of a larger polity (Schumpeter 1942, 203). All the while ridiculing the Enlightenment's attempts to tie liberalism and democracy (247), he admits that theories of popular sovereignty "reflect something more than an ideological postulate and a few pieces of legal technique" (248). These theories, he says, "complement a sociology…of the *body politic* that…partly under the influence of the events of the time took shape and reached its apogee toward the eighteenth century" (248). Put differently, democracy became the championing clarion of intellectuals and politicians only because it resonated with a broader group; these elites thus capitalized on the democratic ideal because it responded to an ethos present in a greater mass of people. Democratization was therefore not merely a phenomenon created and implemented by intellectual and/or political leaders; Schumpeter recounts that it was a far more widespread, dynamic process.

[18] I argue elsewhere that Schumpeter does not seek to criticize mass epistemic capacities but rather elite governing capacities under electoral governments (Piano 2017).

Schumpeter is not only interested in a bi-polar or plebiscitary account of the ways individual elites and a popular ethos paved the way for democratization. Though much can be made of his emphasis on prophetic visionaries like Karl Marx or political geniuses like William Gladstone, to Schumpeter small scale organization and participation from middling groups are integral sources of change in the process of democratization. Petty bourgeois intellectuals like the Fabians were just as important to English socialism, for instance, as Marxists were to its German counterpart (Schumpeter 1942, 322-3). Now, while the Fabians were most certainly not *lumpenproletariat*, they could neither be considered part of the reigning intelligentsia. For Schumpeter, they were a small, subsidiary group of organizers and protestors who did not revolutionize parliamentary policy directly, but still crucially fostered democratic momentum on a smaller scale. With examples like these scattered throughout the book, Schumpeter demonstrates that democratic transformation is made of participation and organization on the part of what he calls the "middle stratum."

To take another example, through his seeming disdain for "Industrial Democracy" Schumpeter begrudgingly recognizes the influence of labor parties in the democratization of economic institutions. Many commentators are particularly drawn to this passage because in it Schumpeter dismisses the masses as only participating by "cheering and booing" for establishment groups, but the overall thrust of the discussion is quite different: here Schumpeter contends that certain labor movements were more effective in achieving democratization of the workplace than others due to the "superiority" of their run-of-the mill—that is to say, its ordinary—members (Schumpeter 1942, 321). He credits the "discipline" of the "rank and file" of English Labor with passing the Trade Union Acts of the late nineteenth century without eliciting any hostility and even inspiring support from both liberal and conservative parties (321). Therefore, while English Labor became vociferously "class-conscious" with greater difficulty than its German counterpart, he claims that it was no less effective in initiating democratizing momentum in the workplace (321).

While space constraints limit a reconstruction of Schumpeter's transformative conception of democracy here, these two examples bring the subtlety of his historical and sociological analysis to light.[19] Contrary to the alternate theory's suggestion, Schumpeter both explicitly states and consistently demonstrates that democracy can be more than a procedural mechanism for political decision-making. His broader argument paints democracy as a transformative idea and ethical maxim that has historically revolutionized social, economic and political structures from multiple avenues. According to his analysis, elites played a large hand in the history of democratization, but only in conjunction with a fervent popular democratic ethos and with the help of smaller, middling groups that advanced the cause through committed participatory action. In this respect, contrary to the alternate theory's suggestion, political organization and participation beyond the elite level is not only possible, but Schumpeter establishes its crucial role in the history of western liberal democratic practice. For Schumpeter, while elections may have procedurally served a democratic end in certain historical moment, democracy, as a category of analysis, cannot be reduced to a mere electoral procedure.

The Classical Democratic Doctrine: The People's Will in Democracy vs. The People's Will in Capitalism

The procedural definition of democracy took center stage in postwar democratic theory, but this tenet was not considered the most "realistic" element of Schumpeter's proposal (Estlund 2008, 258). Democratic theorists of (and after) the behavioral turn felt compelled to reckon with the "realist" and "elitist" nature of his criticisms of the classical doctrine, specifically, the attack on the

[19] For a masterful exposition of this conception of democracy in Schumpeter's work, see Medearis 2001a.

existence of the "People's will."[20] The main reason why, in Part IV's explication, current normative theories of democracy (and specifically, the classical theory) are flawed is because there is no such thing as "the People" or "the People's will," and even if there was, there is no adequate way individuals can meaningfully or collectively act to express this will (Schumpeter 1942, 254). Relying upon the "increasing evidence" against human rationality and his own dismal account of "human nature in politics," in Part IV Schumpeter advertises the nonexistence of both the People and their will as an existential fact that intellectual sincerity cannot deny, thus reinforcing a lack of faith in collective governance and popular participation, and motivating his general call for the "realistic" redefinition of democracy along the procedural lines he proposes (256).

While this criticism of a popular will and mass epistemic incapacity unfolds at the apex of Part IV, Schumpeter makes a competing argument more pervasively throughout the text. The preceding sections of *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* are all devoted to developing an antithetical thesis—in fact, a thesis that I would call the ostensible point of the book: for Schumpeter, the greatest harbinger for a socialist future is the fact that liberal capitalist institutions do not adequately accommodate the changing values, desires and preferences of an increasing majority of individuals. These changing values, desires and preferences cause insurmountable inefficiencies and "frictions" that undermine the liberal capitalist order. Though he never uses the term "the People" or the "People's will" to discuss the "growing hostility" toward capitalism, he creates an analogous category and continually emphasizes how this expansive notion of popular opinion (or, dare we say, the People's will) has the power to profoundly influence social, economic and political change (Schumpeter 1942, 143).

[20] Even Schumpeter's most sympathetic readers identify Schumpeter as an "elite" theorist because of his purported disbelief in "ordinary people's ability to participate in politics meaningfully." John Medearis, *Why Democracy is Oppositional* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 30.

For those who have not read Parts I through III, it is important to note precisely how, outside of Part IV, Schumpeter thematizes the concept of the People without ever calling it such. A variety of rhetorical tactics underscore the fact that, in the context of his discussion of capitalism, there *is* a notion of the People, and their will is to do away with capitalist structures that no longer respond to their moral priorities. Most noticeably, Schumpeter often alludes to a group that could be classified as the People through generalizations about public opinion: e.g., "the public mind has by now so thoroughly grown out of humor with [capitalism] as to make condemnation of capitalism and all its works a foregone conclusion" (Schumpeter 1942, 63; see also 301). What is more, his use of reflexive pronouns in such comments furthers the *collective* dimension of this growing antipathy towards capitalism. To take one emblematic instance, when describing the increasing disdain for liberal democracy, he claims that this system "has no doubt ceased to appeal to *us*" (297). Capitalism as institutionalized through "bourgeois democracy" constitutes a particular historical case, and any benefits claimed on its behalf, he continues, are "contingent upon acceptance of standards which are no longer *ours*" (297).

More explicitly, however, Schumpeter relies on the mystic category of "things and souls" to describe the changing political climate—not just of particular nations but presumably of the world. He states that human "souls" already exhibit socialist mores and socialist preferences at least six times in different chapters, all in an effort to explain how capitalism "destroys its own institutional framework" and "creates the conditions for another," primarily by replacing it with a set of different, and altogether antithetical values (Schumpeter 1942, 162; 220; 223; 224; 323; 364). While his overt goal is to demonstrate how the capitalist process socializes itself, when it comes to the

"growing" tide against the capitalist order, the People and their will actually does exist (Schumpeter 1942, 143).[21]

These rhetorical features do not simply amount to public antipathy or mere public opinion. While Schumpeter may bristle at the metaphysical connotation imbued in the seventeenth century concept of the "will," he additionally constructs a category analogous to the People in a traditional Marxist fashion by specifying how and why each social class disapproves of the capitalist order. He contends that there is a consensus among the masses, the elites and the bourgeoisie that capitalism is no longer a desirable institutional framework—a consensus that is arguably synonymous with the People's will. Furthermore, the overwhelming disdain for capitalist institutions stems from ideological and moral dissatisfaction with the system, and not solely from any hope of greater economic or political returns. This is true even of the masses, who in this context acquire the cognitive capabilities that Schumpeter seems to deny them in Part IV. The concluding pages of the work remind the reader that the "case for socialism is by no means wholly economic"; preferences for increasing real income have "so far entirely failed to conciliate either the masses or their intellectual allies" (Schumpeter 1942, 384). In other words, the masses are *not* inclined toward socialization simply for economic gain—which, by the way, Schumpeter says, would not be wrong either, given the extremely lop-sided structure of the system of rewards doled out by capitalism (74-

[21] The existence of the People's will is *not* undermined by Schumpeter's claim that individuals do not construct their voting preferences independent of institutional structures. True, unlike *later* "economic" conceptions of democracy, which view voters as consumers who choose candidates in order to maximize preexisting values, interests, opinions, and preferences, Schumpeter challenges this view by arguing that voters are not an exogenous source of demand (Schumpeter 1942, 129-30). Yet the endogenous character of voter preferences does not discredit the existence of a People's will (nor does it discredit the existence of a consumer desire); it only takes into consideration how this will (or desire) is constructed. On this point, see Jon Elster, "The Market and the Forum: Three Varieties of Political Theory" in *Foundations of Social Choice Theory*, ed. J. Elster and A. Hylland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 1993, 104.

5; 144-5).[22] Instead, however, the inclination is motivated by a more profound political choice that the masses view as better reflecting their values.[23]

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Schumpeter deems elites to largely constitute the group who most vociferously condemns capitalism. Schumpeter maintains that those persons who are especially "convinced" of socialism's moral superiority (many of whom are elites) will derive satisfaction from living in a socialist society despite any economic shortcomings (Schumpeter 1942, 190). He devotes an entire discussion to "the sociology of the intellectual" and why this type of elite is existentially invested in moral disapproval of the capitalist order (153). The connection between intellectual and political elites in this regard quickly becomes apparent, Schumpeter suggests, as the politician inclines toward actually believing in the platform that he must run on to win electoral contests (153). Even economic elites, who one might think would be more willing to publicly defend the capitalist order, would rather "be commended for their progressiveness or go on holiday" than endure the "hilarity" that would ensue if they appealed to the "public interest" in defense of a capitalist system (214). Perhaps out of weakness or disinterest, or both, elite businessmen and entrepreneurs will not defend the values that capitalism requires for its maintenance.

While the strong distaste for liberal capitalism among elites is expected given that Schumpeter credits intellectuals and politicians with furthering socialist ideology, and economic elites with being inherently too weak to fight it, the real surprise comes when Schumpeter assesses the middle classes.[24] He demonstrates that even the bourgeoisie disapproves of the liberal capitalist

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[22] Cf. Przeworski's view on this matter in Chapter Five.

[23] Schumpeter's holds a powerful conception of popular agency throughout his life. For an early iteration of his view of popular agency, see "A Sociology of Imperialism," in *Two Essays by Joseph Schumpeter*, trans. Heinz Norden (Cleveland: Meridian Books 1955), 16-20, 36.

[24] Martin Carnoy has made a similar point in his effort to classify Schumpeter as "pessimistic." Martin Carnoy, *The State and Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 39.

system that guarantees its very existence: "the bourgeoisie," he says, "is rapidly losing faith in its own creed" (Schumpeter 1942, 161). Part of the problem is that "bourgeois business will shelter the quarry" because its way of life, i.e. the free enterprise system, depends on permitting criticism of its own order (150). But this really cannot account for "bourgeois meekness" since there are plenty of historical instances where specific classes "stand by their guns" and fight for the defense of their preferred regime (161). "The only explanation," he claims, "is that the bourgeois order no longer makes any sense to the bourgeoisie itself, and that, when all is said and nothing is done, it does not really care" (161).[25]

Despite avowing that the People's will is a fictitious construct in his discussion of how that will could conceivably be expressed through electoral outcomes, his effort to demonstrate deepening popular dissatisfaction with capitalism suggests otherwise. Schumpeter makes sure to identify the masses, the elites and the bourgeoisie as constitutive of not only a collective but also a seemingly unanimous public or social category—one that sounds very much like the People who, at least in this regard, exhibit a definite will. Moreover, this dissatisfaction should not be understood merely as an emotional antipathy towards the system. Rather, capitalist institutions create values antithetical to capitalist society and create socialist values that actually better cohere to people's preferences and desires.[26]

Accordingly, not only is the People's disapproval of the capitalist order determinate, but Schumpeter also makes it a decisive driver of social, economic and political change. For Schumpeter,

[25] John Elliot paraphrased Schumpeter on this point in different yet parallel terms: "Capitalism thus breeds not only the means, but the 'will' for democratic social reform 'within the bourgeoisie itself.'" John Elliot, "Joseph A. Schumpeter and The Theory of Democracy," *Review of Social Economy* 52 no. 4 (Winter 1994): 280-300, 283.

[26] This is Schumpeter's argument about the demise of capitalism given "Creative destruction," articulated in Part I of the text.

disaffection with capitalism serves as the key factor in the future transition to socialism. Schumpeter places a great deal of importance on the fact that liberal capitalist institutions no longer possess the "hearts and minds" of the People, a problem which is reflected in the antagonism between the public and private spheres (Schumpeter 1942, 198). He plainly states that the incongruity of, on the one hand, private capitalist institutions with, on the other, how the People increasingly view economic activity as a public concern constitutes "one of the most significant titles to superiority that can be advanced in favor of the socialist plan" (199). Moreover, this clash of structures and principles generates the inefficiencies of liberal capitalism; the contradiction makes the system rely "on the profit principle for [its] daily bread yet refuses to allow it to prevail" (199).

The current structural conflicts characterizing western polities, Schumpeter adds, would be eliminated in a socialist society where people's values and preferences would fit more comfortably with economic and political institutions. Even when understood as a narrow procedural mechanism, he says, democracy cannot be expected to function without the "vast majority of people in all classes" agreeing on the political and economic institutional structures and the values that uphold them (Schumpeter 1942 301). In the present moment, he says, this condition "fails to be fulfilled":

> So many people have renounced, and so many more are going to renounce, allegiance to the standards of capitalist society that on this ground alone democracy is bound to work with increasing friction. At the stage visualized however, socialism may remove the rift. It may reestablish agreement as to the tectonic principles of the social fabric. If it does, then the remaining antagonisms will be exactly of the kind with which the democratic method is able to cope (Schumpeter 1942, 301).

In other words, the incongruity between the will of "so many people" and existing institutions cannot be borne for long if the democratic method is to prevail. It turns out, then, that "the people" (and a rather precise account of who, exactly, that includes) not only want to do away with capitalist

institutions, but their enthusiasm for bringing this to fruition is one of the most compelling claims in favor of a socialist planned economy. Democracy, even when understood merely as competitive election, cannot bear the growing tide of the popular desire for a different economic framework.

As much as Schumpeter does mock the People in Part IV's criticism of the classical theory of democracy —the People as that "semi-mystic entity endowed with a will of its own"—his discussion of widespread, dare we say "popular," hostility toward liberal capitalism constructs an equally mystic, yet ostensibly more undisputed category that, for all intents and purposes, is tantamount to the People's will. Schumpeter even considers the People's desire to dismantle capitalist institutions as rather definite and ultimately decisive since he believes that the capitalist order cannot survive under the stress of its structural tensions for long. Therefore, the overlapping consensus Schumpeter describes amounts *to more than* mere public opinion: the consensus does not only constitute something analogous to what we consider a popular will because it is present in the majority of each social class, but also because, Schumpeter argues, there are sound structural reasons that explain this understandable and legitimate change in preferences and values.

Considering that Schumpeter uses this purported unanimous hostility toward liberal capitalism to explain the "conflict of structural principles in [the] social body," and thereby explain his belief in a socialist future, the People's will not only exists in his political thought, but also informs a major assumption in his argument: capitalism is obsolete primarily because the People now reject it (Schumpeter 1942, 301).

Another Theory: Prescriptive Ideal vs. Descriptive Account

The third chapter of Part IV, "Another Theory," presents the alternate theory of democracy, the "theory of competitive leadership," and ponders its general applicability. This chapter elaborates on Schumpeter's procedural definition of democracy by adding that it is a method in which

individuals attain the power to make political decisions "by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote" (Schumpeter 1942, 269). The elite character of this plebiscitary account is undeniable; Schumpeter celebrates the honesty with which the theory of competitive leadership attests to the elitist nature of liberal capitalism. Some commentators have argued that it constitutes Schumpeter's reactionary response to the democratizing and socializing tendencies he identifies—or that the alternate theory should be read as his deeply conservative bid to prepare the future's elites for the management of a socialist society (Medearis 1997, 830).

Although it is tempting to understand the alternate theory as Schumpeter's ideal prescriptive political model, I propose that *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* gives us reason to view the alternate theory as more of a descriptive account of how "democracy" operates *under liberal capitalism* than any prescriptive ideal or reliable account of democracy in a socialist dawn. Schumpeter himself technically argues no more than this: he maintains that since his alternate account far more accurately describes how what we now call "democracy" has historically operated (at least in comparison to the classical theory) under liberal governments, it serves as the most plausible way of maintaining the democratic method under socialist institutional arrangements *given current political and economic tendencies*. In light of this claim, I emphasize the qualifications that Schumpeter makes to his proposal of the alternate theory—qualifications that arguably do more to criticize liberal capitalism and the institutions that accompany it than to round out an ideal conception of democracy in-and-of-itself. The explicit claim of the alternate theory dares intellectual elites to rewrite democratic theory to match liberal practice, yet as I will show below, Schumpeter warns that the liberal capitalistic practice is, in-itself, unsustainable.

In the pages immediately leading up to Part IV, Schumpeter offers multiple "warnings" that provide and emphasize a crucial qualification to his analysis: it is critical, he stresses, to fully appreciate the "historical relativity" of his argument (Schumpeter 1942, 200). He views his project as

inherently handicapped because it seeks to compare a given reality, i.e., democracy in a liberal capitalist world, with an idea, i.e., democracy in a socialist one. As a matter of fact, he considers it extremely dangerous to launch a comparison between a system in which "we have lived" with a system which "as yet is but a mental image" (187). Although he nonetheless embarks on this hazardous inquiry, his precautionary points remind the reader that we know what democracy in a liberal capitalist system looks like because of the "historic reality before us," whereas even his own musings on what democracy could look like in socialist system are highly speculative (171). This means that while his alternate theory is a more fitting description of what occurs in liberal democracy, its applicability to socialism is considerably less definitive. The alternative theory instead only posits one conceivable possibility of democracy in the socialist arrangement so long as some other elements of extant polities remain consistent.

These qualifications are in keeping with Schumpeter's defense of the alternative proposal. For Schumpeter, the alternative model is superior because it realistically describes the way that democracy under liberal capitalist arrangements has historically operated. Consequently, his argument is based on an itemized list of how the theory of competitive leadership specifically attests to the way liberal democracy works: it accurately illustrates how liberal democracies prioritize leadership selection over policy making by the electorate; it soberly accounts for the minimal role that single-issue groups play in directing legislation; and it completely dispenses with the problem of liberal democracy's failure to adequately "represent" the will of the People (Schumpeter 1942, 272). Finally, democracy understood as a method grants citizens freedom of discussion, but not necessarily any broader notion of freedom than that (272). In eliminating the theoretical standards that the classical theory professes, he claims, the alternate theory actually fits the reality of modern mass "democracies" under capitalist regimes—or at least, what proponents of the electoral procedure "really mean by this term" (269).

After this defense of the alternate theory's more "plausible" theoretical maxims, Schumpeter applies his framework to the experience of western democracies (primarily of British parliamentarism) to further prove just how well his alternate theory matches the practice of liberal politics. Most profoundly, he argues that the way liberal capitalism has implemented democracy through electoral practices has made it so that the only real function of the people is to produce governments (Schumpeter 1942, 273). While the classical theory tries to elide the distinction between electoral and legislative decisions to obscure this fact, the alternate conception soberly and responsibly gives it appropriate priority (273). Schumpeter considers his alternative account of democracy superior because it honestly reflects liberal practice and gives due weight to "representative" institutions.

Why is the link between the alternate theory and the practice of liberal politics so important? For starters, it allows us to redirect the object of Schumpeter's critique. If the alternative theory better describes the realities of liberal capitalism, then we may legitimately place the burden of criticism on the practice of liberal democracy instead of criticizing the classical theory. Given the historical nature of Schumpeter's argument, this proposition may not be as outlandish as it seems. The way that he defends his theory underscores the insufficiencies of liberal capitalism more than destroying any faith in the concept of popular power or the will of the People. The alternate account instead highlights how the exclusive implementation of electoral institutions in liberal democracies has enabled elite-driven political practice quite like what the alternate theory describes. For example, by insisting that the alternate theory speaks to how liberal democracy creates "representative" institution in which citizens primarily make electoral—and not legislative—decisions, Schumpeter draws attention to the fact that the electoral process around which modern mass democracy is constructed is an insufficient organ for expressing popular views on policies to whatever extent citizens actually have them. The less than fully representative institutions that privilege electoral

decisions over legislative ones can thus be understood as a failure of liberal democracy, and not necessarily of the classical theory.

Although an attack on the realities of modern mass representative institutions as opposed to a criticism of the classical doctrine seems contrary to the spirit of "Schumpeterian" sobriety and minimalism, this type of critique may more accurately reflect Schumpeter's thought than we have traditionally supposed. For all of his lack of faith in mass political participation outside of electoral decisions, the argument in defense of the alternate theory is actually based on the inherent shortcomings of representative institutions in producing leadership—that is, in appointing quality men fit to govern once elected (Schumpeter 1942, 269-389). Indeed, Schumpeter summarizes his own analysis in "Another Theory" as an attempt to "put into bold relief the problem of the quality of the men the democratic method selects for positions of leadership" (288). The "democratic method," or election, he writes:

> creates professional politicians whom it then turns into amateur administrators and 'statesmen.' Themselves lacking all the requirements necessary for dealing with tasks that confront them, they appoint Lord Macaulay's 'judges without law and diplomatists without French, ruining the civil service and discouraging all the best elements in it (Schumpeter 1942, 288).

Essentially, electoral institutions necessarily create uncompetitive, plebiscitary elections that inevitably result in mediocre leaders. When read as a description of liberal political practice, Schumpeter's suggestions are a far cry from a full-fledged endorsement for reconceptualizing democracy exclusively along electoral lines.

To take another instance of the shortcomings of liberal political practice, Schumpeter recognizes that the people's legislative capacities would be better served through political institutions that do not solely rely on electoral methods. Since electoral decisions do not necessarily express

public opinion, he states that citizens' preferences "might show more clearly if issues were more frequently decided by referendum" (Schumpeter 1942, 267). Here he claims that the reason why modern mass governments have not provided citizens with the institutional means for making legislative decisions is not because the masses are cognitively incapable of understanding their own interests or acting upon them; rather it is because politicians have invariably been "hostile" to public referenda (267). In this moment, Schumpeter faults interested elite party leadership for the failures of introducing different intuitional forms into modern political practice.

To summarize, Schumpeter contends that liberal democracy fails to the meet the standards professed by the classical doctrine. One obvious response to this contention would be to discard the classical theory, which he says does not fully apprehend the realities of modern mass government, and replace it with an alternative account that is more honest and realistic. However, in specifying the ways that the electoral institutions of liberal democracy fail to satisfy the robustly representative conditions of the classical theory, another remedy to resolve the incongruity between democratic theory and practice suggests itself: instead of altering the classical doctrine of democracy, another option is to initiate institutional reform of liberal electoral practice.

The Inference: Conditions for Success

To be fair, the call to reform electoral institutions in liberal polities does not merely suggest itself by implication; Schumpeter actually suggests it himself in the last chapter of Part IV, "The Inference" (chapter xxiii). Throughout the text Schumpeter frequently complains about the uncompetitive, plebiscitary outcomes that liberal elections have hitherto engendered—even in his beloved England. Consequently, the first "inference" to be drawn from the alternate theory is suggested by Schumpeter's demonstration of how elections necessarily generate inadequate politicians wholly unfit to lead a polity (Piano 2017). In short, he contends that elections do not allow politicians the

necessary time to sufficiently devote themselves to government since they are always engaged in fighting electoral contests, thus forcing upon the men at the helm of political affairs "a short-run view" (Schumpeter 1942, 287). Historically speaking, Schumpeter claims, elections have not ensured the type of elite circulation that we have hitherto assumed.

Schumpeter concludes his diatribe on the inadequacy of politicians generated through election by foreshadowing the supplementary criteria that electoral schemes require if they are to generate adequate leaders. His concluding sentences admit that, contrary to the thrust of the preceding discussion, in the Roman Republic military generals often elected to office did not exhibit the requisite skills, and yet performed "remarkably well" anyhow (Schumpeter 1942, 289). Schumpeter sardonically asks the reader why this should be the case, considering his lengthy exposition on the way electoral competition produces men unfit for office. He replies that "there can be only one answer to this question"—that is, that there were and are external "conditions for the success of the democratic method" *beyond* election to office (289).[27]

Schumpeter subsequently delineates five conditions that enable the success of the electoral method: (1) politicians of "good quality"; (2) a limited range of political decisions; (3) a well-trained and evolved bureaucracy; (4) democratic self-control; and (5) tolerance for diversity of opinion (Schumpeter 1942, 289). These criteria enable elections to produce leaders of a higher quality than can otherwise be expected from electoral competition alone. Thus, the "inference" is that republican Rome was more successful than other polities at maintaining at least some of the other criteria—not

[27] As Will Selinger eloquently puts it, one of Schumpeter's central arguments is that "democracies can survive only if they succeed at moderating and containing the competitive struggle over leadership." Will Selinger, "Schumpeter on Democratic Survival," *Tocqueville Review/La revue Tocqueville* 36 no. 2 (2015): 127-157, 129.

that we should rejoice in the virtues of the electoral method, or in the expectation that reliable political leadership can develop from such mechanisms on their own.[28]

Let us assess these supplemental criteria, or what he terms "the inference" of his theory of competitive leadership. The first condition requires that "the human material of politics" be of a "sufficiently high quality" (Schumpeter 1942, 290). Given that the "competitive" struggle for office is both "wasteful of personnel and energy" and that it usually repels "most of the men who can make a success at anything else," Schumpeter insists that there must be an pre-existing social stratum "that takes to politics as a matter of course," even though there is little to be gained from it (291). This political class must neither be too exclusive nor too accessible; with membership not entirely predicated on experience with public matters, but still integrated through a common set of political traditions, experience, and values; neither too tightly nor too loosely committed to a common professional code that will endow them with a fitness for office otherwise precluded by the competition that election requires (291). To recapitulate, for election to yield somewhat democratic results, there must a pre-existing political class whose quality and fitness for office will not be negatively impaired by the electoral process, but which must pass other gate-keeping mechanisms not explicitly mandated by the political process. Hardly a low bar, or something to be easily attained with minimum, extra-institutional processes and support.

The second criterion for the success of democracy defined on this procedural basis requires that the "effective range of political decisions should not be extended too far" (Schumpeter 1942,

[28] Schumpeter's most generous readers argue that the "Schumpeterian" equation of election and democracy is a necessary but insufficient condition for democratic politics, but they do not further develop this element of his theory or its relation to the alternate conception of democracy as a whole. See Tom Bottomore, *Elites and Society* (London: Routledge, 1964), 93; Jeffrey Green, *The Eyes of The People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); Ian Shapiro, *Politics Against Domination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016); Adam, Przeworski, "Minimalist Conception of Democracy: A Defense" in Ian Shapiro and Casiano Hacker-Cordon, eds., *Democracy's Value* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

291). How far, one might ask? Well, it depends, Schumpeter says, on many things such as: 1) "the kind and quantity of matters that can be successfully handled by a government subject to the strain of an incessant struggle for its political life," and 2) "the quality of men who form the government at any given time and place," and even on 3) the kind of "political machine and the pattern of public opinion they have to work with," and so on (292). As if this is not already quite a lot to determine on a case by case basis, Schumpeter claims that the government must also "impose limits on itself" in order to manage the range of political decisions to be made (292). Here he is not only talking about a system that imposes some form of checks and balances; he also means to include limits on issues which are so complicated that they should be left to "specialists' advice," like the penal code, for example (292). Otherwise, he says, the method of competitive leadership, on its own, can "turn out legislative freaks," developed by inexperienced politicians who are wholly inadequate for the job (292). Crime is a an extremely complicated phenomenon, and legislation about it must be protected from the "vindictiveness and the fits of sentimentality in which the laymen in the government and in the parliament"—that is, political *elites*—are "prone to indulge" (292).

This second stipulation may not seem so hard to accomplish, especially for an Anglo-American readership that presumes to live under a government that satisfies this criterion. But, for Schumpeter, this condition requires an extremely difficult balancing act because the alternate theory does not necessarily require that the "function of the state be subject to its political method" (Schumpeter 1942, 292). This means that almost any type of affair can conceivably made to enter the purview of the state without becoming subject to the electoral process beyond the formal supervision of the governing body. Therefore, he warns that a "politician's power to appoint the personnel of non-political public agencies, if remorselessly used, will often suffice in itself to corrupt them" (293). Of course, this risk of corruption does not affect the principle in question—namely, that the range of political decisions must be limited for effective electoral government—but it does

underscore precisely why the balance necessary in the limitation is so difficult to achieve, and why electoral mechanisms alone can do nothing to mitigate this danger.

The third condition requires not only a highly evolved, well-trained bureaucracy emphasizing tradition and good-standing, one that must be "endowed with a strong sense of duty and a no less strong *espirit de corps*" (Schumpeter 1942, 293). It is simply "not enough that bureaucracy should be efficient in current administration and competent enough to give advice" (293). It must also be of sufficiently high capacity to be able to instruct politicians to do their jobs, and it must have power in its own right such that its "corporate opinion" prevails in spite of any "clamor" that arises whenever politicians or the pubic are "crossed by it, as they frequently must" (293). Remember, he adds, the bureaucracy must evolve out of a long-development: "It cannot be created in a hurry. It cannot be 'hired' with money" (294). It must emerge slowly, he writes, just like the European bureaucracies evolved from the "*ministeriales* of medieval magnates"—so, in other words, give or take half a millennium (294). While Schumpeter sheepishly admits that his preceding commentary on bureaucracy proves that his response here is not "ideal," it is the only "realistic" option available if the democratic method is to be limited to the competitive struggle for votes (293ft6).

Before turning to the "all-important" fourth criterion, let us examine the fifth: that "competition for leadership requires a large-measure of tolerance for diversity of opinion" (Schumpeter 1942 294; 295). Obviously, Schumpeter says, this tolerance is never "absolute," but practically speaking, this condition seems familiar enough to contemporary ears and rather attainable given the experience of western liberalism thus far. However, he is quick to point out that this somewhat familiar threshold "evidently" demands "a national character and national habits of a certain type which have not everywhere had the opportunity to evolve and *which the democratic method itself cannot produce*" (295 emphasis added). Furthermore, tolerance of opinion matters to the extent that election can work democratically only when all the "interests that matter are practically

unanimous… in their allegiance to the structural principles of the existing society," and it ceases to work the moment that "interests and ideas are involved on which people refuse to compromise" (296). Therefore, the competition for leadership produces "effective" results when there exists a nearly unanimous consensus on the ideals and basic structure of society. Any substantial disagreement cannot be resolved through this procedure, and in fact, he says, the procedure itself must be at least temporarily suspended when this kind of disagreement takes root (296).

Finally, we arrive at the fourth supplemental criterion, which Schumpeter finds to be the trickiest, and, incidentally, the one on which western liberal governments have the worst track-record. It can be summed up by what he calls "Democratic Self-Control." Of course, he explains, in some sense this condition is the most obvious, since everyone agrees that in order for this definition of democracy to work in practice, all groups that matter "must be willing to accept any legislation" as long as it stands in the statue book (Schumpeter 1942, 294). But democratic self-control entails "much more than this" (294). Beyond all else, it means that both leaders and citizens "must be on an intellectual and moral level high enough to be proof against the offerings of the crook or the crank, or else men who are neither will be driven into the ways of both" (294). What could this possibly mean, especially from someone who claimed, just a few pages earlier, that the cognitive and agentic abilities of both electorates and politicians are severely impaired in modern mass electoral polities?

In particular, it means that both citizens and politicians must necessarily engage in "a lot of voluntary subordination" (Schumpeter 1942, 294). Politicians must "resist the temptation to upset or embarrass the government each time they could do so," and the opposition parties must learn to accept the lead of a government in power, keeping political warfare significantly contained (294). As if this is not a tall enough order, Schumpeter declares that the "voluntary subordination" of the electorate is even more demanding, as it requires that electors not "withdraw their confidence too easily," at least between elections, and that they accept the "division of labor" between "themselves

and the politicians they elect" (294). In fact, it requires acceptance that citizens must entirely refrain from "instructing" politicians on what to do on any matters whatsoever (295).

Schumpeter acknowledges not only how difficult this voluntary subordination is to achieve, but he also admits that it runs somewhat contrary to the way that democratic practice has unfolded in the history of western liberalism. This reveals why the classical democratic doctrine and the alternate theory are mutually exclusive: a commitment to the democratic method, as the sole criterion of democracy, redefined as the theory of competitive leadership, necessitates shedding western liberalism's historic attachment to institutional forms of meaningful popular participation not just in theory but also in practice: "What could be more natural" for citizens of liberal democratic societies than "to issue instructions to their representatives as the voters for the French States-General did *in and before* 1789?" (Schumpeter 1942, 295 emphasis added). But if the principle contained in the theory of competitive leadership is to be accepted, he admits "not only instructions as formal as those French *cahiers* but also less formal attempts at restricting the freedom of action of members of parliament—the practice of bombarding them with letters and telegrams for instance—ought to come under the same ban" (295).

"Few people realize" that the principle of the alternate theory "clashes with the classical doctrine of democracy and really spells its abandonment" because it asks citizens to stifle the political instinct, developed over centuries, to participate in some institutional form or another *beyond election* (Schumpeter 1942, 295). In other words, the alternate theory cannot tolerate the cognitive dissonance that the classical democratic doctrine, and the history of liberal practice under it, generates for the mass citizenry. While Schumpeter acknowledges the problem, he ends the discussion ambivalently, effectively dodging the implication of his argument: "we cannot enter into the various delicate problems which this raises concerning the true nature of democracy as defined by us," he says (295). Right now, the crucial point is that in large and complex societies, the

purportedly "democratic" practice of electoral polities "has invariably been hostile to political back-seat driving—to the point of resorting to secret diplomacy and lying about intentions and commitments—and *that it takes a lot of self-control on the part of the citizens to refrain from it*" (295).

Democratic theorists who adhered to "Schumpeterian" "minimalism" suggested modifying normative theory in order to scale back its demand on voters to a more realistic level.[29] But, as Richard Bellamy poignantly remarks, Schumpeter admits that his "interpretation" of the success of the "contemporary political system rests on a number of assumptions which are arguably just as unrealistic as those he criticized in the classical democratic model" (Bellamy 2000, 31). Even if we ignore the sardonic elements of his challenge to redefine democratic theory along liberal practice, its successful implementation still depends on criteria no one could seriously define as minimal. And what could possibly be more unrealistic than asking liberal polities to limit themselves and to sever their commitment to extra-electoral forms of popular participation in their understanding of democracy—indeed, in their own historical and normative understanding of themselves?

The Dare: A Prescriptive or Descriptive Account?

I have argued that Schumpeter challenges intellectual elites to rewrite democratic theory along the lines of an alternate model so that it is more consistent with actual liberal political practice. Simultaneously, through the "inference," Schumpeter acknowledges that the theory of competitive leadership is somewhat prescriptive—that is, recommending a change in the present state of affairs;

[29] Przeworski and Richard Posner are the most famous contemporary celebrants of this approach, but Downs and Kenneth Arrow can be credited with its creation in the early postwar period. Przeworski 1999; Richard Posner, *Law Pragmatism and Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Downs 1953; Kenneth Arrow*, Social Choice and Individual Values*, 2nd edition, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963). Most recently, Christopher Achen and Larry Bartels have more drastically diminished the epistemic expectations that can be expected of voters in *Democracy for Realists* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

he admits that, due to historical circumstances, citizens in Western polities have experienced far more political agency than merely selecting leaders through elections. In fact, auxiliary or extra-electoral participation and the normative ideal it represents, he demonstrates, is precisely what has enabled electoral politics to become more democratic; it has given the term liberal democracy substantive meaning throughout both eighteenth and nineteenth century liberal parliamentarism and mass party politics in the twentieth.

So which one is it? Does the theory of competitive leadership offer a descriptive account of how things actually are or a prescriptive ideal of how they should be? Well, it's both. The descriptive attribute describes how liberal political practice officially operates, when no other historical or institutional factors are taken into account. The prescriptive attribute prescribes a change in democratic theory to correspond to liberal practice stripped down to its barest essentials, eliminating all the other elements characteristic of western polities that do not formally correspond with it. It both describes a part of the practice and prescribes a change in theory to match it.

This tension can be resolved by understanding the text as a dare. A dare is neither entirely prescriptive nor descriptive, it occupies a space somewhere in between. Think of how dares function in ordinary language. Dares necessarily mandate a broadened scope of conceptually indeterminacy over the action to be (or not to be) taken. The person who issues the challenge has far less control over its reception than those who make declarative statements or perform other types of perlocutionary acts, such as commands. With this class of language-game, the speaker might not herself have an *a priori* preferable outcome or response in mind. Moreover, there might be significant insincerity in issuing the challenge. In other words, given the context of how the challenge is conveyed, the dare might very well be a joke.

When you dare someone to do something, it is to a large extent up to the recipient to determine the outcome. The fun, as it were, of this language game lies in the speaker's *desired* lack of

control over the possible responses, even if she exercises considerable control over the agenda of possible outcomes. The respondent could justifiably ignore the challenge if it seems too difficult, dangerous or preposterous. Or, if she chose to accept the dare, there are still different ways one could theoretically respond.

Readers of *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* in the postwar period confronted at least two alternatives in how they responded to Schumpeter's polemical challenge. They could, on the one hand, redefine democratic theory along the lines of competitive leadership, and focus on proving the extent to which ordinary citizens fall short of the epistemic capacities necessary for participating in politics beyond voting for leaders. Or, on the other, they could have felt chastened, even humbled by Schumpeter's critique of the inefficiencies of elite rule within liberal capitalism. On this reading, his work could both encourage political and intellectual elites to reflect deeply on their own capacities and limitations and provide them with a type of heuristic with which to do so. This response might have prompted them to consider supplemental institutions that might better undergird electoral ones, which, he says, only exacerbate these limitations—as opposed to doggedly equating election with democracy.

Schumpeter's dare, then, is supposed to play an educative role for his readership. Of course, through the dare, Schumpeter's sets the agenda for possible responses to the crises of western ruling classes posed by authoritarianism: Either accept the dare, and redefine democracy based on the theory of competitive leadership to save liberal capitalism, however unconvincing and fanciful that conception of democracy might be. After all, competitive elections by themselves still make liberal democracies more substantively democratic than autocratic regimes that feature no turnover in office holding whatsoever.

Alternately, he intimates, they should accept the truth, acknowledge the historical tide toward socialist arrangements, and work to protect liberal *political* freedoms within such an economic

order.[30] In this case, elites manage a socialist economy with a stable definition of democracy as competitive leadership in a way that allows for a central authority to manage the economy while still permitting political competition through election.

This agenda setting constitutes the force of the dare's perlocutionary function—that is, Schumpeter uses a dare as a wake-up call to force acknowledgement of the precarity of the political moment; he thinks intellectual, political and economic elites need an agenda of alternatives set before them to urge them to self-consciously choose a direction, be it toward capitalist or socialist arrangements, and not authoritarian ones. Schumpeter clearly prefers economic liberalism and conjures fear of socialism in order to create a sense of urgency in readers who share his aversion to it. But the stakes of the choice are rather clear. Through the dare, he prods his elite readers to answer the following questions: are you sure you are ready to pursue the socialist economic planning you might necessarily imminently be compelled to take up? If so, it must be done responsibly and conscientiously, with coherent theory and practice, in a way that forecloses the possibility of a Stalin in the west.

After the publication of the first edition of *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* in 1942, Schumpeter gave some indication that he expected to prompt some type of political confrontation within his readers. When confronted with the accusation that he never told the reader what should be done about things, Schumpeter, in the preface to the second edition of 1947, responded that he had written the book not to offer "practical solutions," but in order to make the reader "think."[31]

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[30] JanaLee Cherneski demonstrates how Schumpeter inverted the "classical" democratic theory strawman proposed by Carl Schmitt in order to guard against fascist invocations of "the people" and preserve political liberalism whichever economic (capitalist or socialist) instantiation it took in the future. JanaLee Cherneski, "Schmitt and Schumpeter," *Critical Review* 29, 4 (2018): 447 – 472.

[31] "We resent a call to thinking and hate unfamiliar argument that do not tally with what we already believe or would like to believe. We walk into our future as we walked into the war, blind-folded. Now this is precisely where I wanted to serve the reader. *I did want to make him think*. And in order to

Conclusion: Throwing Down the Gauntlet

It should now seem rather ironic that "Schumpeterianism" came to signify a more sober assessment of mass capabilities and expectations in democratic government. If by "Schumpeterianism" we mean a realistic approach in this regard, Schumpeter cannot be considered a realist—on the contrary, he does anything but moderate the demands to be put upon citizens in contemporary politics. For electoral politics to function with a modicum of democratic effect, he says, citizens must radically suppress their historically conditioned political instincts, and leaders must govern at a level of competence significantly higher than what electoral politics allows on its own. In other words, Schumpeter's alternate theory can hardly be considered realistic because it requires institutional supplements and cultural changes that sound anything but likely. In fact, his expectations seem almost utopian.[32]

Moreover, the more comprehensive conception of democracy that Schumpeter develops throughout the entirety of *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* is far more dynamic and expansive than the ones usually identified with realistic or minimal approaches. Outside of Part IV, Schumpeter develops a robust conception of democracy as a historically transformative idea that has shaped political, social, and economic change—as opposed to the procedural definition of democracy that is so vividly remembered and continually championed or criticized. Although he makes his case against

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do so it was essential not to divert his attention by discussions about what from any given standpoint 'should be done about it' which would have monopolized his interest. Analysis has a distinct task and to this task I wished to keep though I was fully aware of the fact that this resolve would cost me a great deal of the response a few pages of practical solutions would have evoked." (Schumpeter 1942, xi).

[32] John Medearis makes a similar point about Walter Lippmann in "Disenchantment versus Reconstruction: Walter Lippmann, John Dewey and Varieties of Democratic Realism," in *Politics Recovered*, ed. Matt Sleat (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 140-165.

the classical theory of democracy by claiming that the People and their will do not exist, his discussion of the demise of liberal capitalism thematizes these concepts and identifies them as determinate and determinative components of institutional evolution. In fact, Schumpeter argues that the democratic method depends on majoritarian agreement about values and institutional standards, which is why popular agency will determine the direction of political and economic institutions in the future.

Finally, Schumpeter's qualifications and the historical relativity of his argument, underscore different implications of the alternative theory than what has turned out to be its legacy: while elaborating the theory of competitive leadership, Schumpeter criticizes conceptions of liberal democracy, in which electoral institutions predominate political decision-making, more than he discredits the classical doctrine or democratic socialism. When the book is read in its entirety, Schumpeter's political thought hardly seems "Schumpeterian"—let alone institutionally realistic in the "minimal" sense.

Interpreters of Part IV have historically understood Schumpeter's realism to beckon readers to call democracy 'what it really is': competitive elections that allow for a circulation of elites. However, in fact, when the book is read in its entirety, a different account of his purported realism emerges. Schumpeter argues that democracy cannot plausibly be equated with competitive election because more robust institutions of popular accountability and participation are required for stable democratic governance. Reducing democracy to a minimal procedure without either intense institutional supplementation in practice or a drastic reconceptualization of democratic expectations in theory, Schumpeter warns, might very well be more destabilizing because it robs democracy of its legitimating force. This renders Schumpeter's challenge to redefine democracy as competitive leadership almost foolish and dangerous—a dare, so to speak, which Schumpeter clearly would never himself take up.

By challenging his elite readership to redefine democracy along the electoral lines exemplified by liberal practice, Schumpeter throws down the gauntlet: He disarms himself—he relinquishes, however temporarily, the additional elements, developed throughout his discussion, that protect his more robust conception of democracy from the minimalist, emaciated one that he proposes. He seems quite cognizant of the fact that the alternate theory undermines much of what he has written up to that point about democracy, and yet he formally challenges his readership to continue in the brazen direction he proposes nonetheless. The future of liberal capitalism, he seems to suggest, depends on it. Who knows, he intimates, maybe "before long," everyone will agree on the absurd notion that the method of election constitutes the essence of democracy (Schumpeter 1942, 235). Schumpeter's democratic theory is therefore not only a far cry from procedural minimalism in an institutional sense, but his text also belies a sober or minimal rhetorical approach.[33] And given the historical conditions under which *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* was written, his rhetorical challenge could seem almost idealistic and even outlandish to his readers—not just unrealistic.

Although Schumpeter cannot be convincingly associated with a brand of political realism characterized by institutional or rhetorical sobriety, he might fit more comfortably under the realist categorization in terms of sensibility and approach, as most famously expounded by Bernard Williams and Raymond Guess (Williams 2005; Guess 2008). Surely Schumpeter accepts the inevitability of conflict, emphasizes man's fallibility in his efforts to contain contingency, and he prioritizes stability over justice, all of which constitute core realist commitments and exemplify the realist's tragic or pessimistic orientation toward politics (Euben 1990; Lebow 2003). On this score,

[33] Through Judith Shklar and Bernard Williams' thought, Katrina Forrester complicates strict understandings of what counts as "realistic" in liberal democratic theory, both substantively and rhetorically. Katrina Forrester, *European Journal of Political Theory* 11 no. 3 (2012): 247-272, 265; 266.

the conceptual landscape Alison McQueen has recently sketched might be useful: realists can ping-pong between a rejection and redirection of apocalyptic attitudes toward secular change, employing both strategies at different moments (McQueen 2018). Schumpeter too exudes a tragic, pessimistic disposition toward elites and liberal institutions but also utilizes an apocalyptic imaginary that exhorts his readers to instantiate a more secure order in the face of the unknown socialist or authoritarian future. When considered in *this* light, Schumpeter's dare to reconceptualize democracy along the lines of liberal practice fits more neatly into the realist tradition.

However, Schumpeter's use of the apocalyptic imaginary also defies this classification. Unlike Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Morgenthau, to invoke McQueen's examples, Schumpeter deploys tragic, pessimistic language and the apocalyptic imaginary simultaneously, and he does not vacillate between moments of apocalyptic rejection and appropriation. While he uses the impending threat of a future socialist regime to encourage a recommitment to political stability, his argument is predicated on the fact that a socialist economy is the culmination a gradual process inherent to the very institutions of capitalism itself. There is no rupture in historical time necessary for the socialist dawn; liberal politicians and economic institutions have been socializing themselves since their inception. Unlike the apocalypse, the socialist future surely does not portend the end of time; it demarcates the subtle change of institutional forms in the continuation of human conflict on earth. From a liberal capitalist elite perspective, he describes this gradual evolution as scarier than any apocalypse, for its inherent logic spells the certainty of current elite displacement—but certainly no end to the world as we know it.

In this sense, we may not only want to question in what ways Schumpeter fits into the realist legacy, but whether *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* and the challenge it presents offer a "blue-print" ideal theory for vulnerable elites concerned about a socialist future. As mentioned above, the performative force of the dare created enough conceptual indeterminacy that Schumpeter could use

it to both *describe* how elections operate under the rules of liberal capitalism and also *prescribe* readers to explicitly redefine democracy under these admittedly unstable grounds. Readers could accept the formidable task of rewriting democratic theory along the lines of competitive leadership, as most postwar political scientists did indeed do. Or, in response to the dare, political and intellectual elites could have responded in a completely different way: they could take the dare as an incentive to supplement minimal electoralism with the auxiliary measures he describes, or to take another tack, they could focus on more soberly figuring out how to effectively participate in rule under democratic socialist economic arrangements.

Afterall, before his ominous prediction of liberal capitalism's doom, Schumpeter warns the reader that all analysis, including his own, "never tells us what *will* happen to the pattern but only what *would* happen if they continued to act as they had been acting in the time interval covered by observation and if no other factors intruded" (Schumpeter 1942, 61). It seems, then, that capitalism's fate rests on how "they" *would* respond to his challenge to rewrite democratic theory.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE UPTAKE
Minimalism and The Americans

> Call the… religion a counterfeit if you like or a caricature of faith—there is plenty to be said for this view—but do not overlook or fail to admire the greatness of the achievement. Nevermind that nearly all those millions were unable to understand and appreciate the message in its true significance. That is the fate of all messages. The important thing is that the message was framed and conveyed in such a way as to be acceptable to the positivistic mind of its time…
>
> —Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*

If one reads all of *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, one becomes less willing to take seriously the theory of competitive leadership set forth in Part IV. When Part IV is read after Parts I, II, and III, the book exudes what Marjorie Perloff calls "Austro-Modern ironic skepticism": a profound skepticism about the power of government to reform human life and about the power of language to convey meaning, a skepticism expressed primarily through irony (Perloff 2017). For Perloff, the Austro-Modernists—Kafka, Wittgenstein, Musil, Roth, Kraus, Canetti—all mourn the fact that language no longer transmits meaning transparently. I would include Schumpeter in this heritage insofar as he too makes a mockery of words like "democracy," and derides the ease with which, in modernity, one can redefine such words to indicate their very opposite.

In this manner, Schumpeter employs the "Modern Machiavellian" method so aggressively that he transforms the purpose that, in the hands of his Italian antecedents, it was intended to serve. Schumpeter shares the Italians' pessimism, and, like them, sought to develop models and theories that offered elites heuristic devices through which they could encourage honest reflection over elite governing capacities and prompt a confrontation with what could be done in these moments of political crisis.

However, Schumpeter's juxtaposing of democratic ideals against the realities of liberal government exposes the brutality of elite domination, accentuating the facts of minority rule in liberal capitalist society such that it seems to be a force too irresistible to oppose. This pessimistic honesty produces the opposite effect of what the Italian theorists intended. They sought to expose elite domination so that neither elites nor masses could delude themselves into thinking that it was acceptable; and, most importantly, so that no one could ever be induced into thinking that such elitism could or should be considered democratic. Schumpeter, on the other hand, sardonically radicalizes this exposé to such an extent that elite power often seems insurmountable. Unlike the efforts of the Italians, Schumpeter's exposé sarcastically challenges democratic theory to embrace empirical studies and reject participatory and egalitarian aspirations—at least in the liberal capitalist present. He portrays minority domination in such a cynical light that the only option seems to be surrender to elite rule, compelling readers to take Schumpeter up on his dare and accept elite domination as part and parcel of modern democracy.

Postwar scholarship did just that. As historian Nils Gilman puts it, readers accepted the alternate theory of democracy at face value "while occluding those elements that were pessimistic about the future or critical about modernity" (Gilman 2007, 47). In response to Schumpeter's dare, American political scientists reinterpreted nonvoting and political noninvolvement as expressions of support for the political system and began to understand "Schumpeterianism" as the equation of democracy with competitive elections.[1] While a few scholars were attuned to Schumpeter's sardonic

[1] This simplistic notion of "Schumpeterianism" pervades political science discourse. For an early iteration of this attribution, see Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1959), 27. Adam Przeworski has always defended "minimalized," "Schumpeterian" democracy in some form (2010). Ian Shapiro has acknowledged that Schumpeter was "distrustful of political elites" (2016, 99), but still understands Schumpeterianism as the equation of democracy and elections. Philip Pettit finds Schumpeter responsible for the "more or less standard" view that democracy does not enable popular direction beyond occasional electoral accountability (2012, 22).

irony, the majority took (and continue to take) Schumpeter's dare very seriously—in fact, too literally. Perhaps this explains Schumpeter's explicitly expressed dismay over his "little volume's" success (Schumpeter 1988, xviii). I speculate that he believed that his irony had been missed and hence his meaning vulgarized and misunderstood; though paradoxically, the dare's vulgarization seems to have procured the ends Schumpeter in some sense desired: popular rejection of liberal capitalism became a thing of the past.

Through the dare, Schumpeter thus radicalizes Italian pessimism and alters its ultimate purpose. Yet ironically, his successors managed to reverse the actual methodological and substantive relationship between Schumpeter and the Italian School, such that, stunningly, Schumpeter came to represent a more genuinely democratic, albeit "minimal," alternative to the Italian theorists. To name just a few iconic examples, Harold Lasswell (1971), Giovanni Sartori (1965), and Norberto Bobbio (1987) transformed Schumpeter's theory of competitive leadership into the "elite" or "minimalist" theory of democracy, and in doing so argued that Schumpeter was less "elitist" than the Italian theorists (Lasswell 1971; Sartori 1965; Bobbio 1987). As late as 1997, Bernard Manin echoed these views when he stated that "the epithet 'elitist' ill befits [Schumpeter's] theories" because "it mistakenly connects them to the elitist conceptions of Gaetano Mosca or Vilfredo Pareto" (Manin 1997, 161). Although Manin remains vague about why, exactly, Schumpeter should not be considered an elite theorist but rather a reconstructed democratic one, he clearly participates in the intellectual tradition of distinguishing the anti-elitist Schumpeter from the substantially elitist Italian School—despite evidence to suggest that, if anything, the reverse is in fact the case.

This following discussion reconstructs how this evolution from purportedly "fascist" Italian thought to "minimal" Schumpeterian democratic theory took place. As we saw in Chapter III, Seymour Martin Lipset's introduction to *The Sociology of the Party* misunderstood the thrust of Michel's pessimism, with devastating consequences for democratic theory. This chapter picks up

where the reading of Lipset left off. While the following discussion highlights a select group of authors in the history of contemporary American political thought, Schumpeter's dare was taken up by political scientists of all stripes, from international relations scholars to those working in American and comparative politics. I focus here on Robert Dahl, Peter Bachrach, Carol Pateman, and Adam Przeworski because of their enormous influence on the development of democratic theory and their massive contribution to the construction of the category known as democratic elitism.

This chapter thus traces the reception of *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* and the transformation of the Italian School's legacy within postwar political science. I argue that American political science ignored Schumpeter's sardonic irony, and concomitantly vilified Mosca, Pareto and Michels' as "fascist" or "elite" theorists; that is, they accepted Schumpeter's dare and instructions for redefining democracy partially by distorting and even at times vilifying the Italians' thought. In an unwitting response to Schumpeter's dare, political scientists, especially Dahl, optimistically reinterpreted nonvoting and noninvolvement by citizens as expressions of support for representative government and began to celebrate "Schumpeterianism" as the salutary equation of democracy with competitive elections—a disposition I describe as "hopeful ambivalence." Political theorists of the left, such as Bachrach and Pateman, responded to Schumpeter's dare with panic, thereby reifying the institutional choices and empirically oriented research promoted in the postwar mainstream against which they were protesting. Finally, through an analysis of Przeworski's work, I show how the response to Schumpeter's "dare" coalesced into an inappropriately sanguine "minimal" theory of democracy. These political scientists all chose to adopt the language of competition and electoral procedure in order to define modern democracy as fair and free election at Schumpeter's sardonic behest, all the while ignoring his warning about the problematic ramifications of doing so.

Robert Dahl: Ambivalent but Hopeful Polyarchy

Dahl's work is paradigmatic of a mid-century American political science movement I call "nouveau elitism." As the most successful expositor of this school of thought, Dahl's prolific contributions to American political science leave an indelible mark on our perception of the Italian School and Schumpeter's thought. Although Dahl borrows heavily from the Italians to develop "polyarchy" as a legitimate regime type, his pluralist system is more elitist than the normative model originally staked out by his forbearers. Dahl's pluralism, and nouveau elitism, generally, bears closer resemblance to what we *remember* the Europeans to have advocated than what Mosca, Pareto, Michels, and even Schumpeter *actually argued*. Dahl consistently attempts to distance himself from elite theory, but his writings appropriate Mosca, Pareto, Michels and Schumpeter's partial conclusions on representative governments, transforming them into a more idealistic, democracy-friendly model, one in which elite domination is somewhat paradoxically deemed desirable. Dahl's development of polyarchy represents a reconfiguration of the European theories in a more dispositionally optimistic light.

In 1956's *Preface to Democratic Theory,* Dahl introduced polyarchy as a new addition to the Aristotelian regime types, explaining why we should not consider representative institutions problematically oligarchic despite certain appearances to the contrary. This first iteration of polyarchy grafts elements of Michels' and Schumpeter's thought onto Dahl's own in the effort to reclassify modern representative governments as polyarchies. Dahl first draws upon Michels' speculation that the need for ruling elite arises only as a result of increased specialization and bureaucratization in the modern age—not because of anything inherent to political organization as such (Dahl 1956, 73). Secondly, he endorses Schumpeter's contention that in modern representative governments, "the rule of popular sovereignty" is most "closely approximated" in electoral

moments (Dahl 1956, 66). In light of these two appropriations, and in response to the challenge Schumpeter posed in 1942, Dahl classifies regimes by analyzing political systems according to different temporal moments within the electoral process: pre-voting, voting, post-voting, and inter-election periods (84). Only on this basis, he argues, can one determine a particular regime's democratic character; that is, by judging the extent to which it fulfills certain metrics of popular sovereignty at various junctures in the voting cycle.

Dahl thus defines polyarchy as a system that exhibits various degrees of popular sovereignty at different stages, but this criterion does not in itself distinguish it from oligarchy. In order to make such a distinction, Dahl combines the Schumpeterian trope of electoral competition with Mosca's insistence on the "multiplicities" of elites; in so doing, Dahl casts election as a more democratic institution than it is currently considered. Electoral competitions among elites, he claims, "vastly increase the size, number, and variety of minorities" who influence the political process (Dahl 1956, 132). One can therefore distinguish polyarchy from other regimes by the criterion of "minorities rule" in the plural— "not minority rule" in the singular, which characterizes oligarchy (132). Though Dahl complains of the inordinate power that elites exert, he ultimately glorifies competitive elections among myriad elites as the element which renders polyarchy an impressive, dynamic political system—quite certainly, he argues, the best of all possible and imaginable alternatives (81; 150).

The glorification of elite competition arises again in Dahl's next major work, *Who Governs?* In his case study of New Haven, Dahl advances his view that, even though American government is controlled by a ruling elite comprised of select professional politicians and socially prominent citizens, it should not be considered an oligarchy. The argument here is similar to the one presented in his earlier work, but the emphasis on elite accountability derived from electoral competition draws on different elements of the Europeans' thought—specifically, Mosca's and Pareto's understanding of pluralities of minority groups who exercise control in a given society. Dahl contends that

polyarchy cannot be considered oligarchy because, in the former, multiplicities of elite groups *with access to different political resources* compete for power. He traces a history of the ruling classes from the Patrician era of the American Republic when inequalities were "cumulative"; that is to say, when wealth, social standing, education, and political power were all in the hands of the same group (Dahl 1961, 11; 21; 85). America's peculiar history of industrialization and immigration resulted in a "gradual and peaceful revolution" (227) away from these circumstances, he argues, where power passed through the hands of different elites until it created a multiplicity of groups with competing political resources—a system characterized by "dispersed inequalities" (11; 227). Dahl thus fuses a Paretian focus on the resources of elites with an historical example of how elites were replenished from the lower classes in a way that evokes what Mosca described as "the democratic impulse."

As a result of this peaceful revolution, Dahl argues, the United States enjoys a system of "executive" leadership with professionals acting as competitive "political entrepreneurs," as opposed to the "petty sovereignties" that dominated in the colonial era and in Europe (Dahl 1961, 309). Throughout this narrative, Dahl takes up Schumpeter's famous political economism to apply the economic language of competition to the political sphere in order to make a case for American exceptionalism. Yet, crucially, Dahl's history of a slow evolution in the makeup of elites contravenes Mosca and Pareto's doubts that varied groups of elites accessing different pots of resources would be enough to eliminate a system's oligarchic or plutocratic dimensions. At this juncture, Dahl can be likened to Mosca and Pareto in that all three study the transformation of elite composition throughout history and focus on a plurality of minority elite groups. However, while the Italians consider the consequences of minority rule to be necessarily antidemocratic, Dahl imbues his narrative with a tempered optimism regarding the compatibility of elite rule and quasi-democratic government.

Who Governs? reiterates the claim that polyarchy cannot be identified with oligarchy despite the presence of a dominant elite because leaders are rendered accountable to the populace through elections. While Dahl expresses this familiar defense of representative institutions, he also undermines this position: Dahl indicates that the accountability of leaders in the American context is determined by the extent to which the populace adheres to the "democratic creed," and the extent to which leaders attempt to exploit it (Dahl 1961, 95; 317-18; 324). Not only does Dahl attribute the success of politicians like his beloved Mayor Richard Lee to such "political entrepreneurship," but the last chapter concedes that blind American adherence to the democratic creed makes polyarchy, in the form of competitive elections, stable (309). In this sense, the answer to the question 'who governs?' seems to be the democratic creed and the politicians who utilize it, thereby undermining his efforts to accentuate the democratic-friendly dimension of polyarchy and to minimize its oligarchic character.

While this tension appears to parallel the Europeans' views—they all heavily stress the importance of a national myth of democracy—it is important to note that Dahl's presentation of these myths dramatically deviates from those of his predecessors. On the one hand, Mosca, Michels, Pareto, and even Schumpeter provide historical accounts for why something like a democratic creed cannot be separated from the institution of election in a way that exposes the oligarchic dimension of representation. Furthermore, they discuss the myth of democracy as a part of a crucial process of demystification, which they believe poses a threat to the status quo of minority domination by depriving corrupt elites of the myths or symbolic structures that help preserve their legitimacy. Dahl, on the other hand, rather incongruously makes a similar point simply as a minor qualification within an otherwise overwhelmingly positive appraisal of the American development of electoral competition. Through this change in rhetorical expression and emphasis, Dahl divorces his

predecessors' pessimistic suspicions from his own more sanguine presentation of electoral competition.

By omitting any explicit discussion of the Italian School while implicitly replacing their suspicious conclusions with a more optimistic assessment, Dahl appears to distance himself from their school of thought. Subsequently, in the 1960's, he attempts to inoculate his polyarchic model from aggressive critiques of nouveau elitism and he vociferously denies any association on his part with elitism of any kind. In "A Critique of the Elite Model" (1958), Dahl attempts to debunk all elite theories, including those of the Italian and Schumpeterian variety, because they are unfalsifiable; or, in other words, the theory that a ruling elite exists can always be cast into a form that "makes it impossible to disprove" (Dahl 1958, 462). The idea that a ruling elite controls political decision-making cannot be "controverted by empirical evidence," thereby rendering it an "unscientific" and unusable theory (462). He asserts that any evidence for the existence of a ruling elite in the US "or in any specific community" has not been properly examined (463) "because the examination has not employed satisfactory criteria to determine what constitutes a fair test of the basic hypothesis" (469).

In other words, Dahl rejects the project of identifying elite domination because it employs a patently unscientific methodology. This methodological criticism seems to undermine any parallel critics might draw between Dahl and the Italian School and/or Schumpeter, and it simultaneously raises the methodological bar so high that a "successful" discussion of elites is nearly impossible. On this score, consider Mosca's protest against any scientific standard employed to judge social theories because it inhibited honest discussion of elites and the identification of their power and privileges (Mosca 1939, 47). Dahl invokes social scientific standards to ward off efforts at exposing minority domination, and so attempts to insulate his own theories against charges of elitism.

In this vein, "Further Reflections on the Elite Theory Model" responds to Jack Walker's accusation that Dahl is an "elite theorist of democracy"—that is to say, one who does not express

confidence in the epistemic capacity of the masses to participate in politics (Dahl 1666; Walker 1971. Dahl sullies Walker's credibility by revealing the latter's poorly cited generalizations, bypassing any response to Walker's substantive criticisms with a call for a separation between normative and empirical inquiry in democratic thought so that "shallow" critiques like Walker's can be avoided (Dahl 1966, 98). This charge seems strange considering the fact that Dahl employs both approaches, and would continue to do so in the effort to further develop his idea of polyarchy. Nonetheless, the article demonstrates Dahl's effort to quash any perception of his thought as elitist, or even as "pessimistic," through his invocation of methodological standards and evasion of substantive engagement.

Despite his efforts, these rebuttals proved insufficient to dispel Dahl's association with elitism and to allow him to escape charges that his model does not recognize that some groups (i.e., economic elites and corporations) are too strong vis-à-vis other groups and vis-à-vis the state to make polyarchy a feasible quasi-democratic, non-oligarchic regime. Consequently, after his colleague Charles Lindblom published a critique of pluralism, Dahl admits that polyarchy, and capitalism in polyarchical regimes, threatens popular sovereignty (Dahl 1984). Dahl concedes as much in *A Preface to Economic Democracy,* which declares that if democratic accountability is morally defensible in the political realm, it must also be a normative aspiration in the economic sphere as well (Dahl 1985). Scholars mark this period as the beginning of Dahl's turn to democratic socialism (Krouse 1982; Mayer 2001). This bifurcation of the pre- and post-1980's Dahl allowed him to disassociate his model from the nouveau elitism that I contend he always espoused throughout his career.

Despite Dahl's concession that polyarchy may undermine popular sovereignty, I argue that this "socialist turn" did not substantively alter his democratic theory.[2] Dahl superficially co-opts

[2] I agree with Jeffrey Isaac that all of Dahl's works embody the "guiding thread" of the concerns expressed in his dissertation. Isaac contends that "Dahl's genuine intellectual interests and political

criticisms impelling him to extend democratic principles to business enterprises while he continues to advance the same basic premises of the polyarchical regime that he first articulated in the 1950's. Even in his magnum opus, *Democracy and Its Critics* (1989), which combines a history of democratic thought with contemporary normative prescriptions, Dahl enumerates polyarchy's virtues and advances a modern, dynamic, pluralist (MDP) polyarchy as the desirable basis of a purported "third transformation" in democratic practice (Dah 1989, 313).

Many view the incredibly influential and critically acclaimed *Democracy and its Critics* as emblematic of Dahl's "democratic socialism" because he targets the Italians—whom he calls "theorists of minority domination"—as the main object of his critique. Although Mosca, Pareto, Michels, Marx, Lenin, and Gramsci all qualify as theorists of minority domination, Dahl mostly focuses on Mosca, Pareto, and Michels. The thrust of his criticism is that these theorists do not adequately weigh the extent to which elections make elites accountable to the demos (Dahl 1989, 276). Now curiously omitting Schumpeter from this discussion, Dahl claims that these theorists make the "elementary mistake" of not applying the theory of economic competition to the public sphere (275).[3] "Even Pareto," he complains, "who as an economist insisted that competition would inevitably force firms to adapt their products to the preferences of consumers, failed as a sociologist

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inclinations were diverted by the academic and political mood of postwar liberal democracy. Once the appearance of liberal consensus began to crumble, so did Dahl's resistance to the more critical insights of socialist theory and practice." This explanation beautifully captures how Dahl responded to the academic trends of his moment, and their influence on the articulation his substantive positions. Jeffrey C. Isaac, "Dilemmas of Democratic Theory," *Power, Inequality, and Democratic Politics: Essays in Honor of Robert A. Dahl*, ed. Ian Shapiro Grant Reher (Westview Press: 1988), 132; 142.

[3] All the more curious when we read that Dahl characterized his work as "a continuing and contentious confrontation with three different theoretical visions that are concisely designated in the title of Joseph Schumpeter's famous book *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*…my sympathies lie most strongly with the last, with which each of the others seem to me to pose serious and still unsolved problems." Robert Dahl, *Democracy, Liberty, Equality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 7-8.

to apply a similar notion to the party competition he acknowledged occurred in the electoral marketplace" (275-6).

This critique sounds very much like the Dahl of the 1950's and 1960's who extolled electoral competition and often applied economic categories to the political sphere (Dahl 1989, 275-6). Yet, by the end of the work, things change inexplicably. In the last chapter devoted to his normative prescriptions for the advancement of democracy, he argues that we must abandon the standard "theoretical perspective" of treating human beings like consumers and we must resist applying economic principles to the political sphere (325). Dahl further argues that the future of democracy rests on an economic order that "serves not merely consumers but human beings in all the activities to which an economic order may contribute" (325). He suggests that advancing his "theoretical vision of democracy" will be a tall order because it "runs counter to more than a century of intellectual history in Europe and English-speaking countries" on this score (325).

So, which one is it? Can the free enterprise, capitalist paradigm be applied to the political sphere and democratic theory, or not? Instead, should a more socialist one be adopted? Is the substantive problem with theories of minority domination that they "give little weight" to accountability achieved through the competition of political elites? Or, should we completely reject this economic model of thinking for a more comprehensive political, social, personal discourse? Dahl never addresses this conflict that he establishes between his lifelong arguments and his latterly expressed normative aspirations. Be that as it may, his parting words give the false impression that Dahl's position has substantially evolved from his first writings.

Despite his long, prolific career, Dahl's oeuvre still constitutes a defining moment in the scholarly literature on democratic theory. His development of polyarchy appropriates and optimistically refashions the Italians' and Schumpeter's thought in a palatable way for positivistically inclined, postwar American political science throughout changing intellectual and disciplinary

trends—but he does so at the cost of distorting their intellectual contributions. Mosca's, Pareto's, Michels' and Schumpeter's pessimistic exposure of oligarchic elements of electoral competition are transformed by Dahl's hands into the optimistic system of polyarchy, a model supposedly more amenable to popular sovereignty than oligarchy—in fact, the best of all plausible alternatives and one that can even be interpreted as a regime type friendly to democratic socialism.

Dispositional Reading: The decisive distance between pessimism and optimism

Dahl's role in the American reception of elite theory cannot be overstated. The way that he appropriates the Europeans' partial conclusions and transforms them into an optimistic ode to representative government laid the groundwork for later perversions of their thought. This re-description of Mosca, Pareto, Michels, and Schumpeter occurred in three phases of his career:

1) During the 1950's and 1960's, the extent to which Dahl relies upon Mosca, Pareto, and Michels establishes sufficient continuity to confirm that his thought descends from their work. Consequently, his submerging of their explicit preoccupation with economic plutocracy beneath a related but distinct concern over political oligarchy becomes imperceptible—so much so that scholars became inclined to blame the Italian theorists, and not American political science itself, for reorienting the debate *away* from plutocracy and toward oligarchy (Winters 2011, 3-8).

2) Dahl infused more hope into his presentation of representative institutions: His early career developed elite explanatory models to demonstrate that modern popular government is less "democratic" than Americans suppose; but also to excuse this reality by arguing that modern "democracies" still ought to be considered popular regimes because they are *more* free and democratic than their previous fascist and present communist antagonists. Dahl's hope for the prospects of fulfilling popular sovereignty despite the oligarchic quality of representative institutions distances his thought from the pessimistic orientation of both the Italian School and Schumpeter; it

gave the impression that Dahl offered a conservative alternative to Soviet communism, but one that was distinctly more progressive than the preceding theories of elitism.

3) While the early Dahl distanced himself from all four Europeans through methodological critique, his work in the 1970's and 1980's professes to change course in a way that seems to fully sever any possible connection between his thought and that of his predecessors. Nevertheless, as I demonstrated above, this purported normative reorientation toward "democratic socialism" did not substantively alter his commitments to electoral and economic paradigms that he articulated in the 50's and 60's.

As previously mentioned, Dahl calls Mosca, Pareto, and Michels "theorists of minority domination." This is certainly a wonderful moniker for the Italian School. These theorists studied the ways that elites dominate political processes in order to expose these tendencies, and consequently to advance democratic theory and the asymptotic fulfillment of popular sovereignty. But for half a century, Dahl relied only partially on their conclusions and ignored critical parts of their arguments in ways that made the Italians conveniently attractive enemies for postwar American political science. What is more, it encouraged audiences to perceive Dahl's polyarchy/pluralism model as a more democratic, albeit still "elitist" regime type. Herein lies the birth of democratic elitism.

Once Dahl was considered to be the paragon of a democratic kind of elitism, the Italian intellectuals came to be seen as proponents of oligarchy who celebrated the way in which liberal political institutions suppress or contain mass/popular participation. This perversion of their thought was primarily facilitated by a willingness to ignore their melancholy dispositions and pessimistic philosophical inclinations. I have aimed to underscore the mood expressed in each historical moment discussed in the preceding chapters because rhetorical disposition should not simply be interpreted as a decorative literary technique—on the contrary, disposition substantively

affects content. While we intuit this to be true, it is too often deemed acceptable to focus on explicit, expressed political prescriptions while dismissing rhetorical style or literary tone. Of course, Mosca, Pareto, Michels, and Dahl all ostensibly study minority domination. Yet if we do not appreciate the contrast between, on the one hand, the Italian School's efforts to combat the tragic effects of minority domination on popular governance, and, on the other, nouveau elitism's qualified endorsement of the oligarchy that modern representative institutions generates, then the difference between the two collapses. It consequently becomes tempting to assimilate all of these authors into one school of thought despite their conflicting conclusions, until we eventually forget that any intellectual and political differences exist at all.

Peter Bachrach: The allergy to pessimism and the genealogy of democratic elitism

Notwithstanding Dahl's distortion of the Italian School, he is not independently responsible for creating the school of thought today known as democratic elitism. Democratic elitism would have never gained such footing in American political science had it not been for the panicked response of participatory democrats to nouveau elitism and Dahl's (and Lipset, Berelson, Sartori, Eckstein, Truman et. al) general popularity. While such a response was widespread, two major works accelerate democratic elitism as an orthodox model of democracy: Peter Bachrach's *The Theory of Democratic Elitism* and Carol Pateman's *Participation and Democratic Theory*.

Although rarely invoked today, *The Theory of Democratic Elitism*'s 1967 publication monumentally shifted the perception of elite theory and shaped the coherence of the category known as democratic elitism (Bachrach [1967] 1980).[4] In this widely read (and taught) pamphlet,

[4] *The Theory of Democratic Elitism* was continually cited in reference to the political contributions of the Italians, and Bachrach's subsidiary piece, "Two Concepts of Power," was until recently the most cited article in the political science discipline. Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz, "Two Concepts of Power" in *American Political Science Review* 56, no. 4, (Dec. 1962): 947-952.

Bachrach misinterprets the Italians' pessimism as expressing an elitist disdain for mass political capacities and democracy writ large, consequently transforming their moral preoccupations and substantive contributions.[5] He then marries the Italians' views to Schumpeter's language of procedural, economic competition based on their supposed shared contempt for mass political agency. His polemic against the insufficiencies of democratic elitism, contained within his suspect genealogy, strips the Italians not only of their concern over plutocracy, but also repackages their contributions so that later participatory democrats rendered their ideas similar to those propounded by the contemporary political science establishment of the 1950's and 1960's.

Bachrach contends that the current approach to democracy reverses the traditional relationship between masses and elites: instead of identifying elites as the main threat to the system (as classical democratic theory would have it), political scientists now borrow from the philosophy of elitism and assume that the perpetuation of democracy rests with the elite's ability to protect the system against the masses. His booklet seeks to explain how this inversion of democratic theory took place.

Initially, Bachrach constructs a genealogy connecting the "fascist" and "aristocratic" "precursors"—Mosca, Pareto, and Schumpeter—to Bachrach's own contemporaries Dahl, Lasswell, Truman, Key, Berle, Korhauser, Sartori, et. al. These pillars of mainstream political science, he claims, used the Italian School to insidiously shift the discipline's attention toward the study of power and away from the true essence of democratic politics: mass participation. The genealogy is predicated on one basic assumption: all varieties of elite theory and contemporary democratic theory share an unfavorable view of the masses; or more precisely, that all such theories consider the

[5] For a discussion of Bachrach's contribution to democratic theory see, Steven Lukes, "The Challenge of Bachrach" in *PS: Political Science and Society* vol 43:1 (January 2010), 91-93.

masses incompetent and practically worthless, at least as a far as political participation is concerned (Bachrach 1980 [1967], 2; 8). As such, Bachrach maintains that the modern defense of what political science now considers "standard" democratic theory is based on the "contention that the best interest of a free people… depends on the ability of the gifted to command and the deference of the many for the well-being of all" (2).

The inversion would have never occurred, in Bachrach's estimation, had it not been for Mosca, Pareto and Schumpeter. The first chapter of his tract therefore begins with a survey of their thought. In Tocquevillian fashion, Bachrach writes, Mosca's and Pareto's cynicism toward "the myth of democracy" prompted them to distinguish between liberalism and democracy, lauding the former and reviling the latter (Bachrach [1967] 1980, 10). Using Pareto's "ridicule" as emblematic of his hatred of democracy, Bachrach presents Pareto's declaration, "we need not linger…on the fiction of 'popular representation' – poppycock grinds no flour," as evidence of his antipathy toward it (11).[6] This form of government, Bachrach shows Mosca to continue, can produce "the worst type of political organization and anonymous tyranny of those who win elections and speak in the name of the people" (11).[7] Bachrach maintains that Mosca and Pareto railed against democracy as both myth and tyranny, a combination which may seem counter-intuitive for contemporary ears (11). He reminds his reader that in the context of Mosca's and Pareto's own historical moment, authors like "Sorel vividly argued and Lenin skillfully demonstrated" that the "power of the myth in the hands of a dedicated and shrewd elite can indeed be lethal" (11).

[6] As quoted in Vilfredo Pareto, *The Mind and Society*, trans. Arthur Livingston (New York: 1935), §2244.

[7] As quoted in Gaetano Mosca, *The Ruling Class: Elementi di Scienza Politica*, ed. Arthur Livingston (New York: McGraw Hill, 1939), 157.

In the first sentence of the chapter, Bachrach admits that Mosca's and Pareto's primary aim was "to avert the catastrophe of a 'demagogic plutocracy'" (Bachrach [1967] 1980, 10). Yet this element entirely drops out of his analysis thereafter. Instead of focusing on their concern for the way representative institutions foster plutocracy, he contends that the Italians were actually motivated to save liberalism from the perils of democratization by showing the illusory prospects of the latter. However, their concern for demagogic plutocracy is crucial for an appropriate understanding of the distinction that Mosca and Pareto drew between liberalism and democracy. The Italians distinguished between these two political forms of organization because they feared that the illusory democratic expectations arising out of electoral, liberal institutions create the opportunity for a demagogic plutocrat to emerge. In other words, for the Italians the conflation of democratic aspirations with exclusive reliance on representative institutions creates the conditions for a "shrewd" member of the plutocratic "elite" to create a demagogic tyranny in the first place (11).

Bachrach fails to recognize that in railing against such "myths," the Italians were troubled by the "the fiction of popular representation," and not necessarily the asymptotic ideal of democracy or mass participation in-and-of itself. For Pareto and Mosca, this pernicious "fiction" was the deceit inherent in the form of "political organization" that pretends electoral institutions can alone adequately represent the people. Put differently but in Bachrach's own language, "shrewd elites" can utilize this myth to tyrannize "anonymously," by speaking "in the name of the people" without actually governing in the people's interests. Here Bachrach demonstrates that Mosca and Pareto feared the myth that results when democracy and liberalism are conflated; that this pernicious combination prompts the emergence of a demagogic plutocracy. As he appropriately highlights, for the Italians, "the shrewd elite," and not the masses, constitute the most "lethal" threat to the political structure.

In a footnote, Bachrach acknowledges that, as "realists," Mosca and Pareto are exceptions to the general elitist paradigm he has proposed in that they believe "governing elites [rule] primarily in their own interest"—and *not* in the interest in the people (Bachrach 1980 [1967], 2ft2). But for some reason this does not impact his view that Italians' chief object of disdain was mass participation. Although Pareto might have conceded that "in the parliamentary form of government…the governing elite 'must now and again bend the knee to the whims of the ignorant and domineering sovereigns or parliaments,'" Bachrach underscores Pareto's claim that "'they are soon back at their tenacious patient, never-ending work, which is of much the greater consequence'" (11).[8] For Bachrach, this means that while at times "the masses might have some influence on the ruling class," for the most part, Pareto deprives ordinary citizens of any consequential agentic qualities.

But the thrust of Pareto's remark here has little to do with democracy or mass participation. Pareto claims that "the parliamentary form of government," government based on elections, may occasionally produce a situation in which the governing elite (a broader elite that may not necessarily hold political office) must obey the "ignorant and domineering sovereigns or parliaments" (that is, an ignorant and domineering *political* elite); but for the most part, the governing elite can tenaciously pursue its never-ending work of satisfying its own interest. "The ignorant and domineering parliaments" to which Pareto refers here are <u>not</u> the masses, but rather incompetent political elites unable to hold the broader ruling class accountable. Far too cynical to entertain the notion that the elite, through elections, can be held accountable to the people directly, Pareto declares that extra-parliamentary elites are rarely even accountable to the political elites that the people elect.[9]

[8] As quoted in Pareto 1935 §2253.

[9] See Chapter One for a defense of this contention.

Bachrach similarly charges that Mosca's *Elementi* "is clearly an elitist and anti-democratic tract" because it denies any effective agency to ordinary citizens (Bachrach [1967] 1980, 11). For Bachrach, the idea of a division between those who govern and those who are governed "is hardly shocking," but Mosca "adds an anti-democratic bite" to this commonplace view when he writes:

> the first class, always the less numerous, performs all political functions, monopolizes power, and enjoys the advantages that power brings, whereas the second, the more numerous class, is directed and controlled by the first, in a manner that is now more or less legal, now more or less arbitrary and violent… (Bachrach [1967] 1980, 11).[10]

To Bachrach, Mosca's elitism is made explicit in his view that "society is governed—irrespective of its political form…for the interest of the minority and by means of manipulation and violence" (Bachrach [1967] 1980, 11).[11]

In this passage Mosca surely exhibits sober cynicism about the possibilities for any enlightened elite to rule in the interest of the people. But from the perspective of Italian pessimism, this cynical declaration does not amount to hostility toward the ordinary citizen's desire or ability to secure her own interest. Rather, it constitutes Mosca's effort to combat the idea that elite domination occurs in the best interest of society writ large, and, to reveal the manipulation and violence that accompanies minority domination. As we saw in Part I, pessimism need not lead to fatalism; in some historical contexts and rhetorical traditions, the dark honesty aims to foster action to combat such tendencies.

According to Bachrach, the saving grace for both Mosca and Pareto can be found in their theories of elite pluralism and elite circulation, respectively (Bachrach [1967] 1980, 10). While

[10] As quoted in Mosca 1939, 154.

[11] As quoted in Mosca 1939, 154.

Mosca's 1896 edition of *Elementi* constitutes a purely elitist tract, Bachrach contends that the six chapters that Mosca added to his opus in the 1920's contain the democratic elements of his text (15). "In perceiving the insight underlying the apparent paradox that democratic methods prudently used can enhance the strength and stability of the ruling class," Bachrach writes, Mosca "finally [recognized] the utility of the elective and representative institutions" (15). While the 1896 version of *Elementi* focused on the "organized cohesive minority obeying a single impulse" of domination, in the later version the ruling class theory "consists of organized minorities obeying diffuse and conflicting impulses" (16). This development, for Bachrach, constitutes "the first formulation of democratic elitism" because Mosca does not as thoroughly emphasize minority domination over the majority in the second version of his treatise (10).

To be sure, Bachrach writes, Mosca "remained essentially an elitist to the end," but only later, during Mussolini's rise to power, did he realize that electoral institutions are not as problematic as he initially thought (Bachrach [1967] 1980, 17). Instead of viewing Mosca's shift as a softening toward his initial enemy, electoral corruption within liberal governments, Bachrach understands it as a revelation of the ways that elections "paradoxically" help keep democracy at bay and perverse a ruling elite by assuring "opportunity for new elites representing diverse forces in society to rise to positions of power" (15). To put it simply, he explains, whereas in the nineteenth century Mosca's interest lied in the "manipulation and exploitation of the masses by the elite," in the early twentieth century his "emphasis [radically] shifts…to the limitation and control of elites within the ruling class by the alignment of differing political forces in separate and opposing political institutions" (16). Bachrach does not elaborate on Mosca's conception of "the democratic impulse," but instead puts a more liberal spin on his view that electoral institutions can "provide an essential medium for political expression and representation, the absence or malfunctioning of which would endanger the proper circulation of elites" (16). For Bachrach, elite pluralism obtained through election defines

Mosca's most "democratic" contribution to political science, but one which paradoxically offers a democratic method to obtain a substantively elitist end: control of the masses.

"Pareto's celebrated theory of the circulation of elites," Bachrach continues, "does not add much other than the phrase itself to Mosca's formulation of the principle" (Bachrach [1967] 1980, 13). Bachrach understands Pareto's view of social equilibrium to be entirely elite-centric, although he acknowledges that Pareto insisted that the governing classes need to be constantly restored "by families rising from the lower classes" and that failure of the governing elite to "remain receptive" to such circulation would "precipitate revolution" (13-4).[12] Nevertheless, Bachrach interprets such claims *not* as a warning to corrupt elites who insulate themselves from such circulation through elections, but as a sign of Pareto's fatalism about the prospects of democratic accountability given elite use of force. Bachrach writes that for Pareto:

> The "shrinking from the use of force by the higher class simply allows the potential elites in the lower strata, who are prepared to use force, to develop and flourish. In the first stage of decline power is maintained by bargaining and concessions, and people are so deceived into thinking that that policy can be carried out indefinitely" [§2509]. Hence in the conviction that "demagogic plutocracy" was a foreseen event, Pareto's mammoth study on social equilibrium closes on *a note of despair* (Bachrach [1967] 1980, 14 *emphasis added*).[13]

For Bachrach, the pessimism pervading Pareto's analysis of the way that elections inhibit the proper circulation of elites translates to a fatalism and "despair" over the prospects of democratic accountability. Like so many Anglo-American political scientists, Bachrach bristles at this kind of cynicism and equates this posture with resolutely anti-democratic proclivities.

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[12] Pareto, *Mind and Society*, vol. III #2509, 1430, as quoted in T.B Bottomore, *Elites and Society* (London, 1964), 42.

[13] As quoted in Pareto 1935 §2059

Bachrach's aversion to pessimism becomes even more explicit in his comparison of the two Italian figures. "Unlike Pareto, whose scathing remarks on majority rule, equality, and the like continued unsubsided throughout his lifetime and who had little difficulty joining the fascist camp," Bachrach declares that Mosca attenuated his cynicism toward representative institutions later in life and therefore deserves more consideration as a democratic theorist (Bachrach [1967] 1980, 11). Even though, substantively, Bachrach argues that the Italians posited virtually identical theories, he claims that Mosca should still be the considered the first expositor of democratic elitism because he is more democratic than his peer:

> Persistent Mosca won his fight, at least in the eyes of history, with his bitter rival, Pareto. For in adding six chapters to his major opus years after it was "finished," *Mosca ended on a note of resolution, not despair*. He had at last an answer to the basic question…the key to the problem, of course, was to maintain an open elite system, providing a "slow and continuous modification of the ruling classes" ... (Bachrach [1967] 1980, 14 *emphasis added*).

Bachrach contends that Mosca was ultimately concerned with maintaining elite power, and nothing more (Bachrach [1967] 1980, 15). But unlike Pareto's ominous "despair," at least Mosca provided some type of "resolution"—something more positive, a concrete quasi-democratic "contribution" to political science (14). The quasi-democratic element of his thought consists only in the fact that he ultimately defended an institutionalization of elite pluralism through the mechanism of election. In this way, Mosca at least offered a partially democratic method for "political science [to] contribute to the elimination of revolutions" (14). For Bachrach, the last iteration of Mosca's work is not as pessimistic as Pareto's exposition, and therefore is more democratically valuable.

Nevertheless, Bachrach continues, this step, on its own, never would have been enough to usher Mosca into the cannon of twentieth century American political science. Despite seizing upon a democratic method for an elitist end, Mosca's thought could have never been "successfully

integrated in the modern context of democratic theory" had it not been for "the radical revision" of this thought performed by Joseph Schumpeter (Bachrach [1967] 1980, 17). Sharing his contempt for mass participation, Schumpeter supposedly seized Mosca's emphasis on the paradoxically democratic nature of electoral procedure (21). However, whereas Mosca would have never equated this part of the electoral method with democracy, Schumpeter uses his insight to redefine democracy in exclusively procedural terms through a focus on economic-like competition.

At the time of *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*'s publication, Bachrach says, an idea of democracy devoid of the commitment to the individual self-development and freedom that proliferates through mass engagement in politics was inconceivable (Bachrach [1967] 1980, 15-16). But armed with Mosca's defense of the elite pluralism that elections promote, Bachrach insists that Schumpeter stripped electoral politics of any attachment to democracy and defined it as a "political method" by promoting the competition through which Mosca's desired elite pluralism is attained (18). Through the use of "elegant" but "faulty" reasoning, Schumpeter, Bachrach recounts, ingeniously posed an "imaginary situation" in which witches and Jews are persecuted according to the rules of a democratic procedure. Surely, we would not agree to such persecution, and therefore, using this hypothetical situation, Schumpeter questions the readers commitment to democracy (18). Obviously, Bachrach insists, Schumpeter's reasoning here is flawed because "group persecution of any sort is in conflict with the principles of freedom of discussion and association essential to the operation of the majority rule principle" (20)—a claim, as I've already shown, that Schumpeter himself already conceded.

Schumpeter thus "posed a false dilemma," but Bachrach admits its actual purpose was to show that "democracy, owing to its inherent nature, is constantly in danger of violating its own principles" (20). The "danger" Schumpeter underscores here "is unlikely to be lost on readers," who according to Bachrach, became more willing to accept a far less democratic option. As a result of

this fear, readers became comfortable with "Mosca's theory of a stable and open political system ruled by elites," a theory which "fits nicely in the democratic frame reconstructed by Joseph Schumpeter," because at least a theory of democracy predicated on the competition of elites allows political consumers some type of choice, and hence agency, when they vote to decide who rules them (21).

This "masterful stroke" that highlights the moral perils associated with democratic procedure, Bachrach writes, allowed Schumpeter to destroy any fully normative attachment to democracy traditionally understood (Bachrach [1967] 1980, 18). The fear that democratic procedures alone do not always secure democratic ends prompted readers to shed their normative commitment to a political system which provided "the political means and climate which stimulate and heighten the development of a free people" (19). At any rate, he adds, Schumpeter makes it inappropriate to criticize systems which provide the majority of people the opportunity to participate only through periodic elections on a procedural basis (19). Without this hypothetical of persecution through majoritarian procedures, Bachrach claims that "it is doubtful that elitism and democracy could have developed as they have into a congenial and close relationship" (19).

In "following Schumpeter's lead," Bachrach declares that contemporary theorists generally agree that "democracy has no overriding purpose to promote" and that its singular function is to democratically "choose leaders" (Bachrach [1967] 1980, 21). In *The Theory of Democratic Elitism*'s subsequent chapters, Bachrach thus connects establishment political scientists of both conservative and progressive persuasions—from Sidney Verba and V.O. Key to C. Wright Mills and A.A Berle—to their "aristocratic" precursors Mosca, Pareto and Schumpeter based on their a) distrust in mass participation in politics, and b) commitment to a procedural conception of democracy based on competitive election (23). Democratic realism, Bachrach insists throughout the text, developed out of the marriage of the two key presumptions of this elitist, aristocratic tradition.

Once Bachrach establishes Mosca, Pareto and Schumpeter as enemies of democracy only interested in the mechanics of elite power, he then identifies the shortcomings of such an approach in a way that implicitly acknowledges the empirical value *of his new understanding* of these theories. Although he initially derides the European precursors for exaggerating the influence of elites in modern society, the second part admits that we must "fully recognize the elite-mass nature of modern industrial society and the implications of this fact for democratic theory" (Bachrach [1967] 1980, 6). Ultimately, he concedes that elite explanatory models are "useful," but laments that they provide no "direction, perspective, or inspiration and fire to reach that which is presently unattainable" (6). Bachrach's anxiety that democratic theory will remain "content" with his rendering of the pessimistic, elite models dominates the text so pervasively that he inadvertently legitimizes their value and validity by portraying them as useful and accurate.

In sum, Bachrach creates a far more elitist position than Mosca and Pareto espoused, and then he inadvertently establishes the veracity of such a position (that is, that modern popular government must necessarily be driven by elite minorities) in his defensive critique of it. By normatively deriding this nouveau elitism while still affirming its empirical validity in modern democratic society (and even accommodating it as a justifiable form of democratic governance), Bachrach's treatment constitutes a knee-jerk response that initiates weighty consequences for the development of the genre.

The truth is that the Italians did share a normative preoccupation—anxiety over elite corruption generated through plutocracy in modern representative governments—but Bachrach superimposes a different commonality onto them: disdain for mass participation in modern politics. Instead of reading Italian pessimism as an expression of antipathy toward the effects of exclusive reliance on representative institutions, the corruption of elites that elections engender, and the plutocracy that can arise in such contexts, Bachrach understands their pessimism as hatred of the

people, and consequently, as hatred of democracy. The replacement creates an easy story for democratic theory to digest in that it connects the precursors to Bachrach's contemporaries, but at the cost of major substantive distortions of Mosca's and Pareto's views. He should have used the Europeans, especially the Italians, as resources in his critique of mainstream political science, not as precursors of its elitist, un-democratic excesses.

Instead, Bachrach's panic-ridden legitimation in fact permits "democratic elitism" to become hegemonic within political science. By explicitly connecting elite circulation to electoral competition based on shared contempt for popular agency, his anxiety amalgamates Mosca, Pareto and Schumpeter with Bachrach's American contemporaries in a genealogy that formalizes a hitherto nonexistent school of democratic elitism. To a certain extent, democracy and elitism had not been officially coupled so expansively until Bachrach did so with his genealogy, which was as faulty as it was influential. Earlier American elite theorists—including Lipset and Dahl in the '50's and early '60's—developed elite explanatory models to demonstrate that modern popular government is less "democratic" than Americans suppose and espouse; and to legitimate modern "democracies" as kinds of popular regimes because they are far *more* free and democratic than their communist and fascist alternatives (Mills [1956] 2005; Banfield [1961] 2017; Mayo 1960; Eckstein 1966; Milbrath 1977). Even in 1967, Dahl was unwilling to call his proposed regime-type "democracy," and instead insists on the term "polyarchy" as an attractive alternative to both democracy and oligarchy precisely because of modern representative government's patently undemocratic features.

Conveniently for Dahl and other nouveau elitists, Bachrach confirms this position *for them* by identifying such forms of political organization as in some sense genuinely "democratic." His panic over the popularity of elite models prompts him to make a strategic error: he takes nouveau elitism one step further by creating a formal school of democratic elitism so that participatory movements would have a cohesive transhistorical establishment position to oppose. As a result, "radical"

democratic theory, typified by Maure Goldschmidt, Lane Davis, Graeme Duncan and Steven Lukes, William Connally, and even Sheldon Wolin etc., became obsessed with debating whether Bachrach's vision of the power-driven elite model provides an accurate depiction and a normative ideal, ignoring whether he constructed an accurate depiction of "the model" itself (Merelman 1968; Medding 1969; McCoy and Playford 1967).

Carole Pateman: Embracing the empirical turn, under pressure

Bachrach's contemporaries, specifically participatory democrats eager to discredit pluralism's popularity within American political science, deployed his genealogy, further solidifying democratic elitism's dominance of the discipline. Carol Pateman's seminal *Participation and Democratic Theory* is the best example of such work. In this text Pateman explicitly credits Bachrach with the genealogy she uses to introduce her critique of democratic elitism. Yet Pateman's rendition offers an even more misleading characterization than did *A Theory of Democratic Elitism*. While Bachrach at least acknowledges the anti-plutocratic motivations of the Italian school theorists, albeit in passing asides and footnotes, Pateman omits such qualifications when she adopts Bachrach's lineage. She even declares that her summary of this approach, thanks to Bachrach, can be stated "without too great an oversimplification" (Pateman 1970). This careless appropriation had profound effects on democratic theory because it further solidified a narrative of an elite democratic theory that never really existed before postwar American political science. Below I assess two crucial aspects of Pateman's re-description of democratic elitism: her incomplete genealogy of the Italian theorists and her rendition of Schumpeter's alternate theory.

Pateman begins by explaining the rise of elite, "contemporary" theory of democracy in a way that is reminiscent of Bachrach's narrative. Today's "orthodox view of democracy," she contends, developed out of the twentieth century experience with failed participatory regimes coupled with the

rise of political sociology and "grave doubts" that it "put forward in the name of social science" regarding the feasibility of participatory politics (Pateman 1970, 2). Mosca and Michels are her paradigmatic examples of sociologists who donned "political theorist's hats" and concluded that elites "must rule" primarily because modern society was simply too complex to allow for the type of mass participation democracy requires (3). However, although Pateman explicitly credits Bachrach for her characterization of Mosca and Michels, unlike Bachrach she neglects to mention that their main concern was to avert demagogic plutocracy. With one omission, this crucial dimension of their thinking officially drops out of the American reception of the Italian School, and this more narrow reading renders the Machiavellians far more elitist than anyone could otherwise legitimately suppose.

Even still, Pateman insists that democratic elitism would have never emerged or gained much traction had it not been for Schumpeter's intervention (Pateman 1970, 3). In order to appreciate the importance of his influence on the development of the genre, she offers a critique of the alternate theory, which she considers virtually identical to the contemporary, "widely accepted theory of democracy (so widely accepted that one might call it the orthodox doctrine)" (1). Again, she follows Bachrach when she discusses Schumpeter's suggestion that readers redefine democracy as a method. She too complains that the famous mental experiment (of procedurally "democratic" persecution of minorities) that Schumpeter uses to convince his readers to adopt the alternate theory is flawed. She reiterates Bachrach's point that "such systematic persecution would conflict with the rules of procedure necessary" to qualify as democratic governance (2n1). Yet she neglects to repeat Bachrach's acknowledgment that Schumpeter posed the hypothetical to highlight the fact that often seemingly democratically procedures do not necessarily secure democratic ends. In this further pared down understanding, Schumpeter's theory of democracy is decidedly more minimal than the version he presents in *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*.

These two components of the genealogy of democratic elitism set up what Pateman sees as Schumpeter's most lasting contribution: the theory of competitive leadership as an answer to the "drastic contrast between the facts of political life," on the one hand, and "attitudes and their characterization" in democratic thought, on the other (Pateman 1970, 3). Schumpeter's idea to liken democratic politics to market competition, and political stability to economic efficiency, she suggests, offered a seductive solution to the apparent contradiction between descriptive accounts of political reality and the normative attitudes in democratic theory, which in turn urged political science to take an "empirical turn" (4). Following Bachrach, Pateman uses economically oriented electoral competition and the championing of an empirical orientation to connect Schumpeter to her contemporaries Dahl, Berelson, Eckstein, Sartori and the rest of the political science establishment mired in the controversy over democratic elitism (3-10).

For Pateman, a two-fold problem plagues establishment democratic theory. First, all modern interpreters have accepted Schumpeter's purported call to evacuate democratic theory of normative content—that is to say, all democratic theorists problematically advance the view that "modern theory of democracy must be descriptive in form and focus on the on-going political system" (Pateman 1970, 7; 16-17). Second, Schumpeter was able to convince democratic theorists to compare "political competition for votes to the operation of the (economic) market; voters like consumers choose between the policies (products) offered by competing political entrepreneurs, and the parties regulate the competition like trade associations in the economic sphere" (4). Through the glorification of economic competition, Schumpeter economized political science, Pateman laments, and everyone else has foolishly followed suit.

For Pateman, then, the Schumpeterian turn in political science was not only catastrophic for democratic theory on normative grounds; but it also represented poor social scientific practice. In order to remedy her perceived Schumpeterianization of political science, *Participation and Democratic*

Theory seeks to discredit Schumpeter's alternative account by demonstrating that his "classical theory" was a myth. Her first charge maintains that Schumpeter makes a strawman of earlier democratic theory. There is no such thing as a cohesive category of thought known as "classical democratic theory," she exasperatedly complains, but for some reason, both proponents and critics of the democratic elitist model have created one (Pateman 1970, 20).

Pateman demonstrates that Rousseau and Bentham maintained wildly different and even incompatible visions of democracy, and as such, they cannot be considered proponents of a singular "classical theory of democracy," as she claims Schumpeter proposed (Pateman 1970, 21).[14] She promises to fill the lacunae left by both defenders and critics of democratic elitism who have not done "the obvious and necessary" work of examining in detail "what the earlier theorists did in fact have to say" (16-17). Though Pateman seeks to rediscover what classical democratic theorists actually said, as we saw above she herself is hardly so hermeneutically fastidious when examining the writings of the purported progenitors of contemporary elite theory.

Pateman critically notes that Schumpeter urged political theory to ground itself in "science…and in the facts of political life" even though he was writing at a time well "before the vast amounts of empirical information that we have now on politics became available" (Pateman 1970, 3). She does not mention that *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* itself is not an empirically motivated piece of political thought. Schumpeter's famous book asks future political theory to embark in a different direction, but its author never employs such an empirical methodology, nor, as Pateman recognizes, could he have done so with the information that was then on offer.

Pateman thus disregards the fact that Schumpeter unabashedly admits that his theory constitutes a strawman. The result of such a reading frees her to caricature Schumpeter's argument

[14] In this sense, she follows Schumpeter's characterization of his strawman classical theory as "Rousseau adulterated with some Bentham" (Schumpeter 1942, 170).

and omit the function that he intended the strawman to serve. If the classical theory was supposed to be the strawman that helped encourage future political scientists to create an empirically oriented school of democratic thought premised on the alternate theory, then Schumpeter was wildly successful. He not only succeeded in inspiring a wealth of empirical research to be conducted along the lines of the challenge he issued to intellectuals, but he also successfully provoked critics like Pateman to conduct their own research in a similar manner.

Pateman makes the case for her participatory theory of democracy along the lines of the Schumpeterian model she describes. As an offshoot of the Schumpeterian model, her participatory theory accepts as its starting point the premise that cognitive capacity is strictly limited to the areas in which individuals have direct experience (Pateman 1970, 45-66). Pateman's strategy therefore takes the empirical evidence developed out of the contemporary school and argues for increased participation in the workplace. Increased worker participation in industry serves as a stand-in for the type of mass political participation that today, she implies, is hopelessly unrealistic (Pateman 1970, 45). In this sense, Pateman's participatory theory begins with the basic premises of Schumpeter's alternate theory.

Pateman demonstrates that proponents of participatory models can rely upon empirical evidence and develop explanatory theories just as effectively as the elite democratic theories currently do. But more to the point, she argues that the empirical evidence suggests that increased participation in the workplace would increase economic efficiency (Pateman 1970, 27; 83). She uses the mining and car industries as examples and says that the facts actually indicate that a participatory system "is the most efficient way to run an enterprise" (66). Not only does she thus embrace an empirically oriented approach, but her exposition conflates economic and political categories and standards in the very ways that Schumpeter sarcastically beckoned future democratic theory to do—

a "Schumpeterian" conflation of the economic and the political that, as we observed above, Pateman herself bemoans at the start of her book.

To further solidify the empirical orientation of her participatory model, Pateman ends the book with a case study of Yugoslavian worker movements. Her discussion of worker self-management clearly accepts Schumpeter's challenge to conduct political science *and* organize democracy along empirical and economic lines. Her conclusion suggests that these empirically demonstrable and economically affiliated paradigms can help us settle for increased participation in the workplace while leaving the representative political system largely intact (Pateman 1970, 110).

Participation and Democratic Theory achieved critical acclaim because it brilliantly employed the contemporary school's empirical findings to contrary ends. In this respect, it offered a critical response to the democratic realists in political science on their own terms more formally and successfully than Bachrach's pamphlet had been able to do. Yet while the panicked pressure to respond to elite theories is understandable, the way that Pateman spurred the conversation forward foreclosed potential avenues that American democratic theory discourse could take.[15] Not only did her success change the American reception of the Italian School, but by accepting, and effectively employing, Schumpeter's dare to initiate an empirical turn and appropriate economic categories in political theory, Pateman does not correct Schumpeter's analysis; instead she ends up putting it into practice.

Adam Przeworski's "Pessimism is informed optimism": Decoupling socialism from democracy, minimally

[15] Pateman's work was wildly influential on the participatory and radical democratic literature, and inspired comment from even those who considered themselves far outside of the discussion. For example, Quentin Skinner heavily relies on Pateman as emblematic of the participatory democratic position. Quentin Skinner, "The Empirical Theorists of Democracy and their Critics: A Plague on Both their Houses," *Political Theory* 1, no. 3 (1973): 287-306.

Given this gradual reduction of the Italians' and Schumpeter's thought to the category of democratic elitism, it may be tempting to think that the "minimal" theory, which narrowly affiliates democracy with fair and free elections, was generated directly through this descendance. Nevertheless, notwithstanding participatory democrats prematurely labeling this theory the "orthodox" model, before the 1980's the equation of election and democracy propagated by the democratic elitists still had not stuck; though hotly debated, according to more neutral parties who, at the time, were describing the theoretical landscape, the equation of election and democracy was still formally identified as the "revisionary"—and not the standard—position.[16]

The "revisionary" theory which identifies democracy with competitive leadership could not have acquired the status of the reigning model had it been confined to the specific debate that raged between realist democrats and "radical," participatory democrats over the prospects of mass participatory politics in modern representative government. In order for this conception to become the dominant paradigm, it needed approval from all domains of political science: in particular, it needed sanction from socialist intellectuals. Adam Przeworski created this consensus. The equation of election and democracy is cemented as the standard conception only after Przeworski's methodological intervention in both socialist and liberal debates.

In the 1980's, Przeworksi convinced socialist intellectuals to eliminate democracy from their vocabulary through a deft reconsideration of Marx's methodology vis-à-vis Schumpeter and Michels. In the 1990's, Przeworksi gained influence over mainstream political science through a similar methodological insistence, now associated with rational choice theory, and through a more thorough economization of democratic theory. In the late 1990's, Przeworski's amalgamation of socialist and

[16] In the 1970's, primers on democratic theory considered Schumpeter's theory "revisionary" even at the peak of attacks on the theory of competitive leadership. J. Roland Pennock, *Democratic Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 286n23; Henry S, Kariel ed., *Frontiers of Democratic Theory* (New York: Random House, 1970).

liberal thought coalesces into "Schumpeterian" "minimalism," an approach that reduces democracy to competitive election, not because popular sovereignty is most closely approximated at the electoral moment, but because of the hindrances to domination by elites that elections provide.

Przeworski's early work emerges within an entirely different conversation than the one which engrossed liberal political theorists (the debate over the philosophical origins of elite, realist theories of democracy). He starts his career in the 1980's being identified as a founding member of the "Analytic Marxists," and as such, prompts his interlocutors to discard the connection between socialism and democracy that plagues Marxist philosophy and inhibits socialist transformation. His first book, *Capitalism and Social Democracy*, poses this motivating question directly: why has democracy, institutionalized through broad universal suffrage, not brought about the advent of socialism? (Przeworski 1986).

Przeworski begins by taking the reader back to the initial historical presumption held by most socialists. From its earliest days (1850), the most influential Marxist expositors insisted that socialism would "extend" democracy from the political to the economic realm through an extension of suffrage (Przeworksi 1986, 5; 9). Marx identified the electoral mechanism as the "most effective instrument in unchaining the class struggle," and Przeworksi claims that Engels, Kautsky, and practically all of his disciples outside of the purist anarchists followed suit (9). Marx's logic concerning the "maturity" of conditions for socialist transformation, Przeworski explains, at the time seemed intuitive enough: Socialists were encouraged to both incongruously champion election and emphasize the class character of the movement because they assumed the ever-growing "numerical majority of the proletariat" (23). Even if in their own late nineteenth century moment, the proletariat (understood as manual workers) constituted a minority, early socialists believed that the process of industrialization would inevitably increase its size. Expanding universal suffrage was therefore supposed to increase workers' electoral power and advance their interests at the ballot box.

Nevertheless, Przeworksi recounts, as the "checkered history of the socialist parties" painfully attests, "we continue to live under capitalism" (Schumpeter 1942, 236; Przeworski 1986, 1). So, what happened? Is it, Przeworski rhetorically asks, that all socialist leaders were "traitors" who "betrayed" workers once they found themselves in positions of power (2)? In a way highly reminiscent of Schumpeter's use of the famed British socialist party leader, Przeworski further prods his reader: can this capitalist fate simply be attributed to Ramsay McDonald's "addiction to the King's tea?" (Przeworski 1986, 2; Schumpeter 1942, 267).

Socialists must stop using this terrible excuse, Przeworski claims (Przeworski 1986, 2). The "root cause" of this predicament lies in a central ambiguity of Marx's thought, and in a misinterpretation of his theory committed by his progenitors: it lies in scientific socialism's view of a two-class struggle as the single determinant of historical development, a theory suggested by Marx and elaborated by socialists who came after him (50). To put it in Przeworski's formulation, the difficulty arises from Marx's class analysis which contends that 1) "only the relations of production constitute objective determinants of class relations,"—i.e. classes can be reduced to the [two] main relations to production [owner and non-owner] and, 2) "classes are continuous historical subjects, once formed, they continue to form as political subjects" in a class-based struggle that determines history (78). On one reading of these two premises, this means that in all historical conjunctures, "struggles to organize, disorganize, or reorganize classes are limited to struggles between or among classes" (80).

Much like Schumpeter, Przeworski finds this interpretation of Marx's statements "concerning class struggle as the universal feature and motor of history" to be both "tautological" and "empirically false" (Przeworski 1986, 80; see Schumpeter 1942, 19). "Why should the analysis of this connection between conflicts at a moment and development over time be a class analysis," Przeworski asks? Similarly, he wonders "why should it be formulated in terms of the relation

between concrete collective actors and places within a system of production and exchange" (80)? To momentarily borrow Schumpeter's more parsimonious language on Marxist theory, Przeworski effectively argues that the reduction of the social structure to "two dramatis personae of owners and non-owners… is not a necessary or natural thing to do" (Schumpeter 1942, 19). For Przeworski, struggles can obviously "be analyzed in terms other than those of class" (80). For example, he writes, we all know that there are "struggles among groups with different levels of income or different degrees of authority…" or race or gender, for that matter (80-1).

If Marx's statements are interpreted in *this* way, Przeworski claims, Marx was "wrong" (Przeworski 1986, 59). However, there is another way to interpret Marx's ideas which does not emphasize class as the main historical determinant of society. We should instead understand Marx's theory, he says, as one which treats society as a "contingent production of strategically behaving *individuals* who are constrained by a variety of economic, political, and ideological conditions" (92). These conditions surely shape individual choices, but the individuals are in no way determined by economic class (92). As Schumpeter put this interpretation long before Przeworski, Marxism reveals that "individuals and groups behave in certain ways whatever they may wish to do—not indeed by destroying their freedom of choice but by shaping the choosing mentalities and by narrowing the list of possibilities from which to choose" (Schumpeter 1942, 129-130).

For Przeworski, this second, more Schumpeterian reading is how Marx's thought "*should* be interpreted" (Przeworski 1986, 80). Przeworski remarks that this methodological focus on "strategically behaving individuals" under the constraint of structural choices is actually what the young Marx was after, but "at some time, I suspect under the influence of Engels' naturalism" Marx "began to think about history as if individuals didn't exist" (92). Be that as it may, Przeworski insists, we must return to Marx's true contribution—a methodology which centers around how various parts of the social structure shape the very rational choices of workers as individuals, and not as

classes. This is what it really means to be a Marxist in the purest sense, and Przeworski asks his socialist readers to "join in the pleas for methodological individualism" (97).

Employing *this* Marxist interpretation—the one that eschews the class-conscious character of the movement and instead adopts the methodological individualism of rational choices—Przeworski proceeds to demonstrate that election, and by implication procedural democracy, is counterproductive for socialists. Despite the fact that Przeworski's reading of Marxism sounds strikingly similar to the one presented by Schumpeter in *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy,* the Austrian émigré remains conspicuously absent from the Polish émigré's *Capitalism and Social Democracy*—aside from one oblique citation in the opening pages on the failure of socialist parties (Przeworski 1986, 12). As opposed to explicitly invoking Schumpeter's thought, Przeworksi turns to Michels to develop his own "empirical" argument.

The succeeding chapters elaborate Michels' analysis that political parties have a significant effect on individual voting behavior. Michels was right to insist that election, conducted through party competition, will always lead to the "embourgeoisement of socialist leaders," Przeworski says, but, more importantly, Michels reveals that elections produce results contrary to socialist evolution because of the kind of consensus elections require (Przeworski 1986, 125; 100; 127). To put it sharply, the point of Przeworski's analysis of political parties is to prove the following: "Elections are just not an instrument for radical transformation. They are inherently conservative precisely because they are representative—representative of interests in a heterogenous society" (129). Przeworski contends that "the error of the early socialists was to have thought that one could precipitate radical social transformation through the electoral process" (129). Not only did socialists err in thinking that election would help realize their goals of nationalizing the means of production, they were also deluded in thinking that democratic procedure would provide "a clear mandate for

grand projects for a better future" (129). Misinterpretations of Marxist theory thus led to the delusion that socialist transformation could be achieved through the democratic method.

And besides, even if electoral procedure could produce a clear enough mandate in such heterogenous societies, Przeworski denies that "anyone living under capitalism, including workers, would have good reasons to prefer socialism" (Przeworski 1986, 223). First, he rejects the notion that socialism would more efficiently administer the distribution of resources than capitalist economies; but even if it did, he says, "rational workers … would not move in the direction of socialism…because of the temporary loss of welfare that capitalists would be able to inflict upon them as retribution" (237).

Moreover, we should also question the link between democratic procedures and socialist outcomes on political grounds. Like the competitive market, for Przeworski a "democratic political system constitutes another mechanism by which individual preferences are aggregated" (Przeworski 1986, 218). Government policies reflect the aggregated preferences of individuals (qua citizens) so long as "political competition" is fair and free, so long as voters are sovereign enough to express their choices (218). However, unlike in the market, "individuals are weighted equally" when democratic procedures aggregate preferences (218.) Consequently, elections result in a "demand for a different allocation of resources" than when those very same preferences are aggregated by the market (218). At first blush, this reasoning makes the procedural, democratic basis of socialism seem compelling: a democratic method "would permit the society as a whole, by which I mean all individuals through a democratic process, to decide collectively which needs should be satisfied," and therefore, presumably, that equally weighted collective decision would result in a socialist resource allocation, traditionally understood: collective decisions, for example, that dictate less economic inequality, or the abandonment of private ownership, or even abandonment of capitalist mode of production that seeks only to accumulate profits (238).

And there's the rub: the democratic process, i.e. election, will give individuals *choices*, and Przeworski cautions, those individual choices will not necessarily advance traditional socialist goals (Przeworski 1986, 238). By committing to a democratic procedure, he writes, "the notion of 'the' socialism, socialism in the singular, becomes untenable" (238). Przeworski asks the reader to engage in a thought experiment: Let's pretend that, somehow, elections were able to shed their representative character and reflect an overwhelming mandate in a heterogenous society. In this case, "socialism" might very well prove victorious, and yet, much like Schumpeter's speculation about the unknown contours of socialist society (Schumpeter 1942, 170), Przeworski warns it would mean that we would arrive at a socialism in which "the outcome of political conflicts" might be:

> to direct society resources to maximize free time; we may arrive at one that would maximize employment, one in which people would seek beauty, one in which they would not leave the capitalist rationality of maximizing consumption, and also one in which they would devote all the resources to armaments (Przeworski 1986, 238).

True, he concedes, the "superiority" of a socialist organization of society might very well lie in the fact that it allows "society as a whole to choose in a democratic way the mix of needs to be satisfied in the allocation of resources" (Przeworski 1986, 238). But, unfortunately, how the society "would allocate these resources cannot be determined a priori since we do not know what people would do if they were free to choose" (238). As he makes clear throughout the text, Przeworski believes that in this event workers would prioritize their own immediate material interest and support the continuity of capitalist system because they would be unwilling to disturb their short-term material well-being. Be that as it may, even if we close our eyes to the fact that "the democratic process"—i.e., electoral procedure—is unlikely to yield socialist transformation because of the structure of consensus, he claims that it would not necessarily bring about socialist political outcomes, even if they were theoretically possible.

What does Przeworski seek to advance in decoupling democratic procedure from socialist policies? To be clear, he says, his analysis does not disqualify him as a socialist. Somehow, his argument does not "lead to a rejection of social democracy," nor does it imply that "reforms are impossible," nor that workers "would never opt for socialism" (Przeworski 1986, 239). He is even unwilling to label his conclusions as "pessimistic" about the future prospects of socialism. "Pessimism" is nothing but "informed optimism," and therefore, he writes, his grim projection about the potential for socialist transformation are not only "informed," but border on the "optimistic" (239). As opposed to Pollyanna assertations of the democratic advent of socialism, his optimism aims to get an "informed" picture of what advances the socialist cause and what does not.

First, his socialist interlocutors must accept that socialism may be possible "only on the condition that the movement for socialism regains its integral scope" and leaves behind the view that democratic procedure will eventually procure socialist ends (Przeworski 1986, 248). Second, socialists need to eschew the idea that the socialist project should be predicated on "the continual improvement of material conditions of the working class" (248). Socialism might become conceivable, he maintains, when it is reborn as "a social movement and not solely an economic one, when it learns from the women's movement, when it assimilates cultural issues" (248).

Although Przeworski remains silent about which issues ought to be assimilated, one thing is certain: as far as the revitalization of socialism is concerned, "the time is not near" (Przeworski 1986, 248). At the present juncture, "there is every reason to expect that capitalism will continue to offer an opportunity to improve material conditions…while conditions for socialism continue to rot" 248). He discourages his comrades from the unproductive optimism in "dreaming of utopia," since that distracts from the informed, optimistic "struggle to make capitalism more efficient and more humane" (248). Right now, he claims, we must optimistically concentrate on "improving capitalism" through democracy, but this struggle must not be confused with "the quest for socialism" (248).

Soon thereafter, Przeworski publishes *Paper Stones: A History of Electoral Socialism* in collaboration with John Sprague. At its most basic level, the text uses empirical data on social democratic parties to animate the electoral dilemma that socialist parties historically faced in choosing between class consciousness and winning electoral matches (Przeworski and Sprague 1988, 1-3). As he describes it in both *Capitalism and Social Democracy* and *Paper Stones*, when social democratic parties decided to participate in elections, they abandoned the possibility of socialist transformation: "by broadening their appeal to the 'masses'" in order to generate electoral support, "social democrats weaken the general salience of class as a determinant of political behavior of individuals" (Przeworski 1986, 27). Following Michels' analysis from 1915, in *Paper Stones* Przeworski details how in Belgium, France, Denmark, Germany, Norway and Sweden, courting "small peasants," "petty bourgeois elements" and groups outside of the manual labor force meant that socialist parties could not continue the class-conscious program since that message did not "appeal" to the "entire working population." (Michels 1962, 254; Przeworski 1986, 100; Przeworski 1988 [1986], 8). With empirical science at his command, Przeworski "analytically" demonstrates that the democratic procedure of election will not procure the ends dreamt of by socialists because "the working-class bases of left-wing parties is being eroded,"—because they are diluted by other groups which are required to win the vote (Przeworski 1988).

Paper Stones thus provides an empirical account of the historical thesis Przeworski presents in *Capitalism and Social Democracy*, and simultaneously bridges the gap between Przeworski's socialist interlocutors and liberal, mainstream American political science. His socialist readers are again asked to disassociate democratic procedures from socialism, since elections will only diminish the working-class basis of left-wing parties and destroy any possibility for socialist transformation. Instead, he repeats, socialists should focus on ameliorating the worst vicissitudes of capitalism, as opposed to doggedly standing by the conviction that democracy will eventually breed socialist policies. Liberal

political scientists were of course quite pleased with the analysis that severed democracy from socialism, but more importantly, they praised Przeworski's version of rational choice and "the rigorous modeling" and "data sets" he employed; they hailed the analytic, "methodological individualism" that Przeworski supposedly derives from Marxist theory (Przeworski 1988).

Paper Stones was one of the few books in the late '80's which could simultaneously boast endorsement from opposite ends of the political and methodological spectrum. On the one side, Felipe Pimentel insisted it was necessary reading for anyone "interested in the possibilities of radical transformation present within democratic capitalist society," and, on the other, Sidney Verba, proclaimed that the text ushered in an "important new standard for research in political history" (Przeworski 1988 [1986]). Przeworski's rational choice, or, depending on your political leanings, "methodological individualism," provided the terms on which all of political science could agree that, at the very least, democratic procedures do not produce socialist outcomes.

In 1991, Przeworski published *Democracy and the Market*. With the fall of the Soviet Bloc, Przeworski is now free to wholly embrace the economic logic of market competition in his conception of democracy; he even ventures that we understand democracy in terms of a Paretian equilibrium model (Przeworski 1999, 26-34). To be fair, his position does not change from his work in the '80's, but rather than clinging to more precise language about "democratic procedure" or "democratic process," Przeworski equates democracy *tout court* with election through market logic much more explicitly than before.

Democracy and The Market begins with the self-proclaimed "informed optimistic" aim to "illuminate the obstacles typically confronted in building democracy and transforming economies" (Przeworski 1991, xii). Free of soviet oppression, Eastern European countries now find themselves "embracing capitalism," but "they are poor" (191). A clear understanding of democracy will help these countries better combat "vacillations" between technocratic, market-oriented programs that

ameliorate poverty and the participatory expectations that arise out of the new political conditions (191).

Consequently, Przeworski proclaims, democracy should simply be understood as a system "in which parties lose elections"—and nothing more (Przeworski 1991, 10). He complains that even those definitions of democracy which make contestation the central feature, such as Dahl's, still ambivalently "treat participation on a par with contestation" (10). While it may be "attractive" to discuss participation from a normative standpoint, "from the analytic point of view," he finds participation irrelevant: "the possibility of contestation by conflicting interests is sufficient to explain the dynamic of democracy," and no other feel-good hedging should be "analytically" entertained (11fnt2). At the end of the day, participation does not "universally" appear in democracies, Przeworski writes; it is neither a sufficient nor necessary condition (11). Notice that we are no longer talking about democratic procedure or democratic method: All that is needed "to identify a political system as democratic," he maintains, is to ascertain whether elections provide the opportunity for certain [presumably elite] individuals to contest previous results through competition for those same positions (10).

As Przeworski notes, even the most "elitist" or "realistic" theories of democracy are unwilling to eliminate the role of participation in electoral democracies, even though they effectively do so in their definitions. He insists on formally ending this charade which feigns that participation has anything to do with the democratic character of a regime. More than any of his predecessors, Przeworski drastically confines democracy exclusively to the electoral function. Impressively, he does not even pretend that mass participation is involved through the enactment of electoral campaigns, and instead shifts the focus on the ability of elites to contest each other's positions, and marshal just enough, but no more, votes to prevail.

In 1993, Przeworski leaves the founding group of Analytic Marxists (Cohen 2000). In 1999, he publishes "A Minimalist Conception of Democracy: A Defense," a summary of the "minimalist" theory he latently developed over the preceding twenty years (Przeworski 1999). In this widely read piece, Przeworksi is more transparent about the Schumpeterian sources of his thought: he seeks to defend a "minimalist," "Schumpeterian" conception in which democracy "is just a system in which rulers are selected by competitive elections" (Przeworski 1999, 12). He again expresses annoyance with the "normatively attractive" definitions that predicate democracy on a random variable, such as participation, equality, representation, etc.… "the list goes on" (12). Readers must instead admit the suspicion that we all share: "all there is to democracy" is that "rulers are elected," and, presumably, can be unelected (14). The point of his exposition aims to determine, once and for all, whether this criterion is really "too little" to be valid (14).

Do we really need all the other elements (participation, equality, accountability, and even representation) to make democracy stable and robust, and, Przeworski asks, even the most normatively attractive option? Surely, "the quality of democracy" can always be asymptomatically improved, he admits, but in the end, "the *miracle* of democracy" lies in the fact that "conflicting political forces obey the results of voting" (Przeworski 1999, 16; 15 *emphasis added*). The optimistic approach to democracy, he suggests, actually coincides with the realist, minimalist conception. Can you believe it, he marvels: in a democracy, "People who have guns obey those without them" (16)? In Przeworski's "analytic" hands, elections cease to provide the means through which we can satisfy the desired ends of participation, equality or even representation; they are, in-and-of themselves, the ends which makes democracy a "miraculous" enterprise.

Electoralism thus constitutes the feature which provides grounds for optimism. Although Przeworksi spends most of the piece likening elections to a coin toss, ultimately, he argues that they are more than random institutional devices that determine winners and losers. Elections are

powerful because of the coercive power of voting (Przeworski 1999, 13). However, contrary to long-standing popular belief, this coercive power does not come from consent or the opportunity for participation that this consent implies; it does not, he insists, come from individuals agreeing "to accept decisions of as yet undetermined content as long as they can participate in the making of these decisions" (15). Rather, the compliance that elections command comes from the fact that they inform "everyone who would mutiny" if the results are not obeyed (15). In democracies, he explains, voting does not "reveal a unique collective will but it indicates limits to rule" (15). Elections inform winners and losers of existing "passions, values, and interests," of the power and support certain factions garner, and how things would likely result if violent confrontation were to emerge between opposing forces (15). In other words, elections function as a barometer or signaling device to other elites: Voting indicates to elites the limits of what they can push, of what they can and cannot get away with, and discourages violent "mutiny" between them as a result (15).

Unlike democracies, dictatorships do not exhibit this feature, Przeworksi argues, which is why they require "secret police" (Przeworski 1999, 15). The information that elections generate for elites is what makes living in a democracy the better alternative. Put differently, the crucial element of democracies is that "voters can choose rulers through elections" (16) and the information generated from this choice will constrain elites and inhibit violence. He admits that other conditions may need to be fulfilled for democracy to endure, but even if democracy "cannot be improved" beyond the mere presence of election, this minimalist, Schumpeterian conception of democracy, he maintains, would still be the one "worth defending," both "empirically and normatively" (16).

This emphasis on elite limits brings us back full circle to the Italian position. The Italians acknowledged that elections can in some circumstances limit elite rule. Of course, at a basic level, forcing elites to compete with each other imposes some constraints on them, which is why, despite their critiques of liberalism, Mosca, Pareto and Michels did not think that elections should be

eliminated. Nevertheless, the Italians still foregrounded the problems with systems that rely too heavily on the electoral mechanism. They sought to underscore the fact that such institutions, without supplementation, encourage an incumbent ruling class toward corruption because of the lack of competition that elections actually allow. Their critiques did not consist in the anti-democratic inclination that elections allow for too much mass participation. Rather, it was that elections structurally engender the corruption of ruling elites to stack the electoral deck in their own favor, and furthermore, that the plutocracy which elections breed insulate a corrupt ruling class from external pressure until it is too late—until they find themselves on the precipice of violent revolution.

While Przeworski shares with his European forbearers the intention to discard the idea that elections serve as an adequate expression of popular sovereignty (whether that sovereignty is construed in terms representation or participation), the divergence between Italian pessimism and Przeworski's "informed optimism" is pronounced. To take just one point of comparison, as Przeworski notes, Michels painfully details the way that political parties create a class of leaders that are incapable of remaining beholden to workers' interest. Likewise, Michels underscores the way that elections even inhibit smaller-scale reforms because of the consensus that elections require. But unlike Przeworski, for Michels this feature of electoral government and its dependence on political parties is only tragic; in no way should it be considered "miraculous.'" As we saw in Chapter Three, in Michels' words, his study proves that electoral government cannot be empirically equated to democracy, nor does he think that as a result of such grim conclusions, the equation of democracy with election is the normative position "worth defending."

Although far less forthcoming about the precise sources of his "Schumpeterian" inspirations, Przeworski deploys Schumpeter's thought somewhat more faithfully. Using Schumpeter's argument as a template, Przeworski disassociates democracy from socialism through a

reconsideration of the history of socialist parties and through a reinterpretation of Marxist methodology as rational choice theory. Under the auspices of this new, "methodological individualism," he unites liberals and socialists through a minimal, informed but optimistic approach to democracy. This "Schumpeterian" definition champions descriptive facts of empirical science over normative prescriptions, uses the language of competition to conflate economic and political categories, and, most importantly, celebrates the electoral limits placed on elites as the integral element of democratic politics.

Conclusion: The Prophet and His Disciples

Schumpeter, in Part IV of *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, dares his readers to redefine democracy by 1) undermining the concept of the people and their rule, 2) disassociating democratic procedure from democratic outcomes, and 3) decoupling the presumed connection between socialism and democracy existing in the popular imaginary. Although throughout most of the text he is unwilling to narrowly theorize democracy strictly in terms of competitive election, Part IV challenges his readers to follow these steps by applying the language of economic competition and by evacuating democratic theory of normative aspirations.

After the publication of *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, all exponents of political science, whether of the realist, participatory, or socialist variety, assiduously followed these three instructions, as it were, to the letter. To recapitulate:

Beginning in the 1940's, postwar political science heeded Schumpeter's proposal to reject the concept of "The People" as a useful analytic category. An entire genre of empirical studies sought to discredit both the concept of a cohesive category known as "the people" and the notion that mass participation exists in liberal representative government. Furthermore, if it were to develop, such

studies contend, this participation would constitute a destabilizing force in democratic practice (Berelson 1954; Greenstein 1963; Plamenatz 1958; Kornhauser 1959).

Starting in the 1950's and continuing through the 1970's, democratic theorists of opposing political inclinations heeded Schumpeter's call to divorce democratic procedure from substantive democratic outcomes by likening politics to economic competition, and, in so doing, confined democratic theory to debates over the empirical reality of liberal government. Whether they admitted it or not, both Dahl and Pateman adopted such an "empirical" paradigm and enacted this trend to advance theories of democracy which could not only accommodate representation, but also champion its place in modern popular government.

At the same time, Dahl, Bachrach, and Pateman similarly insisted that Schumpeter's political thought entirely dismissed mass participation and confined such participation only to the moment of election. This charge not only connected Schumpeter to Mosca, Pareto and Michels on suspect grounds and reduced the Italians' thought to this narrow preoccupation, but the new version of the "fascistic" Italian School also seemed to impute some redeeming qualities to the Schumpeterian theory of competitive leadership. This faulty, minimalistic genealogy simultaneously solidified the category of democratic elitism and accelerated its emerging status as the reigning, "orthodox" model of democracy.

Finally, in the 1980's Adam Przeworski officially severs democratic procedures from socialist aspirations, not only based on Schumpeter's impetus to analyze the less than encouraging history of socialist parties since 1850, but also through a revision of Marxist thought (Schumpeter 1942, 236). Somewhat surprisingly, under a new Marxist "methodological individualism," in the 1990's Przeworski unites socialists and liberals such that both sides agree to identify democracy writ large with the presence of fair and free elections—a minimal, Schumpeterian definition of democracy, which can optimistically provide the only informed way forward, for both socialist and liberal aims.

As I have shown, Schumpeter self-consciously develops a far more participatory, transformative theory of democracy that cannot be limited to competitive election. He articulates a robust conception of "The People" and their decisive power, under democratic arrangements, to do away with elites and institutions that no longer correspond with their desires and priorities. So why does Part IV prompt his readers to adopt the theory of competitive leadership, a theory which his own analysis proves both normatively insufficient and empirically inaccurate?

Perhaps Schumpeter had no problem with his message being misunderstood, radicalized, or used even for ends contrary to the ones his analysis more explicitly indicates. Maybe he did not mind sharing the fate of the "prophet" Karl Marx, whose message, he writes, was inappropriately transformed into a "religion," a "counterfeit…or even a caricature of faith," which held little ground for plausibility (Schumpeter 1942, 6). For Schumpeter, it might not have ultimately been especially terrible if "nearly all those millions" who came after him "were unable to understand and appreciate [his] message in its true significance" since, after all, that is "the fate of all messages" (6). Speaking of Marx but perhaps also thinking of himself, he writes, as long as his message was "framed and conveyed in such a way to be acceptable to the positivistic mind of its time," perhaps it did not matter to him the way in which his disciples decided to interpret it (6).

As we can see now with eighty years of hindsight, Schumpeter succeeded in following the Marxist "vision" he articulates in Part I of his book (Schumpeter 1942, 6). Like Marx, through his own "language of prophecy," the language of competition, he frames his challenge to redefine democratic theory in a way that was "acceptable to the positivistic mind of its time"—a thoroughly economized mentality that draws distinctions between, indeed, elevates empirical facts over normative prescriptions, even if his disciples interpreted his message in ways that are incompatible with Schumpeter's explicit political and economic conclusions (6).

It is impossible to determine whether Schumpeter intended *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* to develop a "counterfeit religion" that reduced democracy to a single element, election, of what is a more comprehensive doctrine. But that is exactly what happened. There were many other disciples beyond Dahl, Bachrach, Pateman and Przeworski who accepted his challenge to redefine democracy as election, whether they wanted to or not. However, had any of them read the text in its entirety, with attention to its disposition and tone, these disciples would have seen another option: Political scientists could have just as easily followed Schumpeter pressuring elites to respond to democratic demands and emphasizing extra-electoral practices and institutions, as opposed to enacting a wholesale revision of the meaning of democracy.

In fact, compelling elite responsiveness to democratic impulses and underscoring the inadequacy of elections to ensure political stability were precisely the political aims that the Italian theorists sought to advance in their own work. Had Schumpeter been read more capaciously, then perhaps his connection to the Italian School would have been interpreted more appropriately. Moreover, had Mosca, Pareto, Michels and Schumpeter's shared focus on elites been understood as a critique of liberal capitalism as opposed to a resolutely anti-democratic posture, then maybe debates over the fictious category of democratic elitism would not have suffocated discourse in American political science for over half a century.

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