Routledge Innovators in Political Theory

Democracy, Pluralism and Political Theory

SAMUEL A. CHAMBERS
AND TERRELL CARVER

William E. Connolly

William E. Connolly's writings have been at the leading edge of political theory since the 1970s. This book draws on his numerous influential books and articles to provide a coherent and comprehensive overview of his innovatory work and his contribution to the field of political theory. This book focuses in particular on his thought in three key areas:

Democracy
Connolly has created an entirely new subfield in political thought, that of 'agonistic democracy'. His work in democratic theory – through his critical challenges to John Rawls on a theory of justice and to Jürgen Habermas on deliberative democracy – has created a powerful new literature.

Pluralism
Connolly has remade entirely the theory of pluralism, transforming it from a conservative theory of order into a radical theory of democratic contestation based on a progressive political vision.

The Terms of Political Theory
Connolly has changed the language in which Anglo-American political theory is conducted, opening it out to an entirely different 'Continental' tradition in political and philosophical thought.

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Routledge innovators in political theory

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1. **William E. Connolly**
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Introduction

Politics, theory, and innovation: the writings of William E. Connolly

Samuel A. Chambers and Terrell Carver

Questions

This collection of the writings of William E. Connolly presents his work from each of the past five decades as an *innovation* in/of/to the field of political theory (the choice of preposition may be significant and cannot be decided from the outset). But what can it mean to 'innovate' when the field at hand is political theory? This question points to a prior question that has nagged at the conscience of political theorists for at least the last half century: what is the role of political theory and the political theorist in the first place, especially in its uneasy relationship to the discipline of political science? And finally, this question, in turn, obviously echoes the question left for Plato after the death of Socrates (as we have it in the *Apology*): what is the relationship between philosophy and politics, between the thinker and the polis in which he or she lives?

Our task here is not to answer this final query, what Straussians might call *the* question of political philosophy, but we mention it at the beginning since it will always be there, in the background, at the end. That is, to call William E. Connolly (or anyone else for that matter) a true *innovator* in the field of political theory is to suggest that he has made a particularly important contribution to the task inaugurated in its broadest sense by Socrates and Plato – the task of rethinking politics. To make the case for Connolly as someone who has innovated in the field of political theory, then, we must not only demonstrate that his writings offer us a rethinking of politics, but also indicate how that very rethinking proves to be a provocative, fertile, and productive one. This volume therefore illustrates, through its presentation of selected published and unpublished writings by Connolly from as far back as 1969 to as recently as 2007, that taken as a whole and interpreted in light of its impact on the field, Connolly's project proves profoundly important not just to the field of political theory but to our broader sense of how we understand the political and what we take politics to be and to mean.

Context

As a thinker, Connolly is a traveller. Many academics today, due to the exigencies of the job market, must travel extensively, often criss-crossing the country to take up a variety of posts. Connolly, by contrast, has held only two permanent academic posts since completing his PhD – both at universities located near one another along the eastern seaboard of the USA. Connolly writes most of his books and teaches most of his classes not many miles from Washington, DC.

Thus, many might wish to mark Connolly's work as particularly 'American'. And, indeed, Connolly's most famous work (see 'Texts', below) offers a very specific and focused contribution to the debate over the status of American political science as a discipline. It has thereby spoken to and helped to reshape a debate that was essential to the development of political science in North America. But this debate hardly took place at all in the rest of the world, since the impact of the 'behavioral revolution' on social science departments in the USA proved unique. Connolly also writes extensively about the relationship between faith and politics, urging both intellectuals and progressives to refuse a certain secular dogmatism and to remain in dialogue with the 'believers' who are the vast majority in America. Again, these arguments emerge in particular ways from the specific context of the role religion and politics play in the USA, and they clearly have a greater intuitive appeal on one side of the Atlantic.

Nevertheless, even if one wishes to somehow position Connolly within a tradition of American political thought, one will be unable to confine him there. That is, just as we 'place' Connolly in America we must 're-place' him as well, since his thought can be categorized as 'American' only to the extent that it speaks so much more broadly than any simple 'American context' would allow. As one colleague put it, 'Connolly is the American who dealt with the new Continental thinking'. At the same time, he is the American political theorist (certainly one of the first) who insisted that political theory think global politics and consider seriously the work of colleagues in the field of International Relations. This makes him the American political thinker who breaks from the confines of merely American or Anglo-Analytic sources, who refuses to narrow his vision to the American context, and who rejects the sequestering of political theory from broader global political concerns.

Thus, while Connolly's thought may well express many elements of the North American context from which and to which he writes, he also works diligently to set up resonances with other contexts. His work *links* analytic and Continental traditions, US and European thought, politics and religion, and traditions of political theory and political action. We can therefore read his thought as an expression of the world he inhabits, without reducing his work, his texts, or his person *to* that world. Connolly's writings always gesture towards a future, different (better?) world. Above all, even

as he confronts historically-defined problems, given to him by his political context, Connolly simultaneously reshapes and resignifies those problems. This capacity to remake an old problem and render it as something new is precisely the talent of the innovator.

Innovations

Connolly's writings have pushed the leading edge of political theory, first in North America and then in Europe as well, for more than two decades now. Connolly currently occupies the enviable position in which his earlier writings are repeatedly reread while his current books are eagerly anticipated (he is almost canonized while still writing). He has published numerous books and dozens of article, but his importance to the field of political theory far exceeds any numerical accounting. We apply the word 'innovator' to Connolly and his writings precisely because of his ability to inspire, to motivate, and to engage his readers. Connolly has the rare ability to write books that can simultaneously spark the imagination of students new to the field of political theory and invigorate the thinking of senior theorists.

To begin to make good on this claim, let us cite two recent experiences. In the Spring of 2006 one of us (Chambers) taught Connolly's *Pluralism* (2005) to a group of final-year students in the UK. These students had little or no background in political theory, and only passing familiarity with the political conditions in the USA that animate much of the writings in the text. Yet the text spoke to them in a way that few books from their university career had done. They sometimes found Connolly frustrating. He draws from a wide array of difficult thinkers, most of whom these students had never even heard of, all of whom they had never read. Yet they always found Connolly *engaging*. That is, they could tell that this American professor of political theory was trying very hard to speak to *them*, i.e. to speak about and to a world that they found familiar. This motivated the students to try to participate in the conversation. Connolly's work makes students want to talk not only about the politics in the text, but also about the ideas, the concepts, and the theories of politics. Anyone who teaches political theory (anyone who teaches, perhaps) knows how difficult this moment is to achieve. The fact that Connolly's work is clear and accessible enough to achieve such success with undergraduates makes the second anecdote all the more impressive. In the Autumn of 2006 we received an email from a senior colleague in political theory, someone who has been teaching and reading contemporary political theory for a number of decades and someone who knows Connolly's work extremely well. One would think that very little Connolly could write in a text called *Pluralism* would excite such a world-weary thinker. But in a very brief email message this colleague described his reaction to the book even more succinctly: 'Blew me away. I'm fired up to do something. Very compelling and inspirational book' (anonymous email to authors).

Connolly always writes about difficult concepts (from 'identity/difference' to 'agonistic respect' to 'fugitive thinking') and hard theories (from Foucault to Bergson to the texts of neuroscience), yet he always does so in an approachable, fresh, and accessible style. And he writes not only broadly but also with a clarity of focus: despite covering so much diverse ground in political theory, Connolly has consistently returned to a few key concepts and theories. He has proven himself a true innovator in the field of political theory on a number of distinct but related fronts. We have structured this collection of his writings by grouping them into three broad headings; each of which identifies a crucial strand of his broader project and each of which names a significant innovation.

The theory of pluralism

Over the course of almost 40 years of returning again and again to the topic, Connolly has helped to remake entirely the theory of pluralism. Pluralism had a very particular and very much politically-charged connotation in American political science in the 1960s. Robert Dahl's now classic *A Preface to Democratic Theory* (1956) set the terms of the pluralist literature, providing a particular reading of the American tradition that had both political and social scientific implications. In terms of politics, pluralism offered an explanation of the problem of low voter turnout by redescribing non-voters as satisfied with the system. Inside the ivory tower, pluralism called for (just as it was made possible by) a furthering of that project to remake the study of politics into the discipline of political science. Connolly's work utterly transformed the terrain by helping to resignify pluralism: from a conservative theory of order based on the status quo into a radical theory of democratic contestation based on a progressive political vision.

Here we offer readings that start with an initial critique of what was known in 1969 as pluralism, to a comprehensive restatement of Connolly's own utterly transformed theory of pluralism in 2005. Connolly thoroughly refutes the model of interest-group competition and goes beyond the Rawlsian assumption of 'reasonable pluralism'. For many thinkers, pluralism has become a staid and static concept that merely points to the 'way society is' or that suggests a theory of group formation and interaction. In Connolly's hands, the ethos of pluralization not only calls into question those theories of society and group formation, but also expands the reach and impact of pluralism, of pluralization, well beyond the 'starting point' role that it had in mainstream approaches. Connolly makes a consistent and impassioned call not merely to attend to pluralism as a given state of affairs but to strive for pluralization as a goal. Pluralism is not to be overcome in Connolly's project; it is to be deepened and fostered. Not since James Madison's *Federalist no. 10* has an American political thinker made such an important argument for what Madison called 'the multiplication of factions'.

The ethos of democratic agonism

Under this category we mark Connolly's unique contribution to the creation of an entirely new subfield in political thought. Connolly's *Identity\Difference* (1991) was a landmark in political theory, as it made the most compelling case for how the post-structuralist understanding of identity should be connected to both democratic theory and the everyday practices of democracy. Connolly argued most compellingly for an 'agonistic' conception of identity, in which one's identity only makes sense in relation to that which it opposes – that which stands outside of identity, yet does so precisely so as to constitute identity. Identity depends upon otherness; this means that democratic theory and politics simply cannot presume a stable or autonomous identity from which politics would then arise. Instead, Connolly calls for the cultivation of 'agonistic respect' for the other and for practices of critical responsiveness that develop this respect.

Connolly's work in this area, coupled with other key texts that emerged around the same time – some of which were deeply influenced by Connolly – led to a new area within democratic theory called 'agonistic democracy'. Agonistic democracy offers the most important, the most fundamental contribution that Connolly's work makes in democratic theory. From a different angle, this conception of democracy again interrupts, perhaps even overturns, the traditions of Rawlsian theories of justice and Habermasian theories of deliberative democracy. It has spurred the creation of a fertile and powerful new literature to which any democratic theorist must now attend. Some, it seems, have mistaken Connolly's insistence on agonistic respect – on a striving both against and yet *with* one's enemy – for a notion of democracy as competitive or antagonistic. Despite the fact that they sound the same, antagonism and agonism are not really synonyms; thus, we title this section 'the ethos of democratic agonism' so as to highlight these differences.

The terms of political theory

Finally, Connolly has changed the language in which Anglo-American political theory is spoken, and entirely shuffled the pack with which political theorists work. He has, again, been at the forefront of the movement in the last half of the twentieth century and well into the twenty-first to open the field up to an entirely different tradition of political and philosophical thought. This project begins with Connolly's consistent and incisive critique of behavioral political science, with his forceful challenges to the empirical/normative distinction and his commitment that the pursuit of the study of politics must call on models other than that of an outdated seventeenth-century 'science'. But Connolly's contribution here far exceeds that of the political theorist doing battle with political science; Connolly has also sought over the years to renew, to reinvigorate, and always to challenge the terms of political theory as well. Eschewing the constraining terms of

Anglo-analytic philosophy, Connolly (with the help of many others) turned to the Continental tradition. Connolly's work has been particularly instrumental in bringing Friedrich Nietzsche and Michel Foucault into the conversations (oral and written) of political theorists, and it has thereby helped make these thinkers permanent points of reference in political theory. His efforts have helped to remake the terms of discourse that he set out to analyse in his most famous writings.

The writings in this section of the book perhaps prove more disparate; they include pieces from four different decades, and the conceptual debates taken up here prove quite varied. What they share, however, is an insistence on language, conceptual frames, concepts (take your pick) as constitutive of politics. And they therefore indicate the extent to which to rework the terms of political theory, of political analysis, is to open up a new space for both political thought and action – to do politics differently.

Readers

Many readers of this volume will already know Connolly and his work well, and they will likely find numerous pieces in the volume familiar. For them, we offer not a new book *of* Connolly's writings nor a new book *on* Connolly, but a particular configuration of Connolly's theoretical and political project over all five decades in which he has published. This reconfiguration of Connolly's body of work presents his writings in a new light. One strength of Connolly's writings can be found in their timeliness, their ability to speak to the field of political theory in a way that is relevant, productive, and fresh, while also illuminating the political world around us, the one we find ourselves in here and now. He speaks directly to that world, and his works reflect this: each is a direct engagement with a particular time and place, and therefore, taken as a whole, there is an episodic nature to Connolly's oeuvre. This collection certainly conveys to readers the sense of Connolly as a thinker committed to ideas and to texts while also engaged with the world around him.

But Connolly himself insists that 'it is important to be untimely sometimes' (1995: 655), and our reconfiguration of his works here highlights this dimension. Thus, we do not reconstruct the historical context to which Connolly spoke in a particular text. And we wish to prevent that context from circumscribing or constraining the message and vision of Connolly's works. Connolly's best arguments speak both *to* and *beyond* a particular context; he writes to and for his historical present, but he also writes to and for a future-to-come that is beyond the predictions of empirical political scientists or the expectations of political pundits. For all of these reasons, the reconfiguration of Connolly's project that we produce herein offers very much that is 'new' to those readers who know Connolly's work well. The temporal differences that are collapsed in this volume – as readings across different times and place are brought together into a new time and

place – produce another sort of untimeliness, one consistent, we think, with the spirit of Connolly's work.

Other readers may know Connolly or his writings tangentially, perhaps becoming aware of them only through other thinkers who engage one of Connolly's threads of research, or through his students or other writers he has influenced. For these readers, this volume also serves as an introduction of sorts to Connolly and his work. By grouping Connolly's 'contributions' to the field into three distinct categories we give new readers specific points of entry into Connolly's project. These categories clearly cut across disciplinary boundaries, epistemological disputes, and political conflicts. Each of them, then, offers something different to different readers, while collectively they express the breadth of Connolly's impact on the field. Those coming to this book from outside post-structural political theory but from within the field of political theory may gain the most from the section on agonistic democracy. It is here that Connolly refashions the terms of traditional democratic theory but does so in a way that speaks broadly to the questions and concerns of political philosophy (and here we intentionally confuse political thought/theory/philosophy precisely so as to muddy the differences that Leo Strauss sought to clarify). Those coming to the book from outside political theory but from within political science will certainly gain the most from Connolly's work on the terms of political theory in the third section of the book, but the first section on pluralism will also speak directly to their concerns. Finally, for readers from outside the field of Politics broadly construed, each section offers something significant: pluralism, democratic struggle, and conceptual analysis are all problems or issues that echo across the social sciences and humanities.

This re-presentation of Connolly's writings makes a particular case for his contribution to political theory, while at the same time offering an excellent opportunity for *teaching* his work – and in so many ways, Connolly's work was written to be taught. Connolly writes not to systematize but to engage, not to formulate but to stimulate; for these reasons it offers a valuable resource for the classroom. Unlike the work of a thinker such as John Rawls, it is hard to know where to start in teaching Connolly. With Rawls one simply begins with *A Theory of Justice* and then moves forward with him as he defends and elaborates the project begun there. And therefore a book like this one hardly seems necessary for a thinker who approaches politics and theory in the way that Rawls does. With Connolly one will not find *a* unique and monumental project, and one will certainly see no desire to defend the same set of ideas over a long period of time. The threads of Connolly's particularly salient contributions, then, are woven together by us after the fact, and we present them in a particular way here. Our goal is to draw out the impact of Connolly's work on the field of political theory as a whole, while not occluding the particular contextual interventions that each of his works makes on its own terms.

Texts

As the structure of the book makes clear, Connolly's 'innovation' has not been singular; he has *innovated* in political theory precisely by coming at the field from different angles and by speaking from it with different voices. Connolly is perhaps best-known as the author of *The Terms of Political Discourse* (1974), one of the most important works of North American political theory in the 1970s, and one of the few that is still in print today. That book – excerpted in the third section of this book (chapter 11) – analysed many of the terms and methodologies of political science, using the conceptual analysis that lies at the heart of political theory. It is therefore a work of political theory, but perhaps one aimed at an audience of political scientists. Despite the fact that much of Connolly's early reputation in the field was staked on this work, he did not stick to this *modus operandi*. His 2002 book, *Neuropolitics*, offers a stark (counter-)example. Here Connolly engages in rigorous detail with the emerging literature of neuroscience in order to make a powerful case for broadening and reworking on key critical concepts in political theory.

In one sense, then, these two works are nothing alike. The former appears almost 'properly' disciplinary, as it speaks from within one sub-field (political theory) of the discipline of political science in order to make a contribution precisely to the discipline as a whole. Indeed, one reason for the longevity of *The Terms of Political Discourse* certainly lies in its historiographical significance: it speaks both to and from a key moment in political science in which the discipline found itself intensely concerned with mapping out its own identity and future trajectories. This was a time when US PhD programmes centred on rigorous training *across* the discipline – a time when books like Connolly's most famous one, books that tried to bring the discipline together in some sense, were not uncommon. In other words, it was a time very much unlike today. Graduate students at most top research universities in the USA are still required to take doctoral exams in two subfields, but the subfields are now no longer the traditional four (political theory, comparative politics, international relations, and American politics) but have been increased to include 'subfields' such as methodology and 'formal theory', or to allow students to take a 'second subfield' in other departments. This allows quantitative students never to encounter political theory; it allows political theorists (e.g. those who take all their 'non-theory' classes in the philosophy department) never to encounter (at least not if 'encounter' denotes any sort of serious engagement) anything but political theory. In short, today's new US-trained PhDs in political science, even if they should have the desire, simply have not gained the background necessary to write a text like *The Terms of Political Discourse*.

Nonetheless, this text shares something very significant with *Neuropolitics*, written 30 years later: a commitment to broadening and deepening our understanding of the political. Times have changed (some might say radically)

and there's no doubt that Connolly's writings reflect these changes and are inflected by them. Yet, despite the deep and meaningful contrasts, in both cases Connolly is operating across disciplinary differences. That is, despite working squarely within political science, despite speaking directly to the audience one might expect it to speak to, *The Terms of Political Discourse* proved to be a radical text because of what it proposed that political theory had to say *to* political science. *The Terms of Political Discourse* agrees with the dominant views of the time in that it seeks, in its own way, a certain unification of the discipline. It insists, along with mainstream political science, that political theory has a role to play in the discipline more broadly conceived. However, it rejects, and does so in powerful terms, the role of handmaiden to science that had been offered to political theory by the behavioural revolution. Rather than exiting the conversation as so many before and after him have done (and this is not always a bad choice), Connolly changes its terms. *Neuropolitics* is a similarly, although perhaps more obviously, radical text, not only because it cuts across disciplinary boundaries, but because it suggests to political theorists that they have much to learn from properly *scientific* fields of inquiry. This has been hard for political theorists to accept, since they spent the past two decades either refuting or eschewing the empiricists' modelling of the study of politics upon a putative (though, as Connolly shows, wholly and woefully outdated) 'scientific' model.

Thus, if one element marks Connolly's writings consistently across genre and context it is this: Connolly always has the guts and the nerve to tell his audience exactly what they do *not* want to hear. Hence the very title of his book, *Why I am not a Secularist*, which was designed to call out liberal and leftist political theorists for their own form of dogmatism over questions of religion and spirituality. This ability to provoke marks all of Connolly's texts and all of his innovations.

Provocations

We have constructed this volume so as to continue, prolong, and reconfigure those provocations. In the spirit of Connolly's own call to 'agonistic respect' and 'critical responsiveness' we must further this project by refusing to rest with a presentation of Connolly's provocations *of us*. We close then, by offering a few of our own provocations to him and his work. Because Connolly himself has never followed a single path in political theory, one does not find 'standard critiques' of his work the way one often does with other thinkers (e.g. the critique of Rawls for his conception of the person, the critique of Butler for ignoring the body, etc.). Our task here, then, is not to rehearse previous criticisms; nor, really is it to offer our own. Instead, just as Connolly consistently seeks resonances in his work, so we would like to point to potential dissonances. It is in this sense that we offer the following problematizations.

Sources

As emphasized above, many of the most important resonances produced by Connolly's work come about when he 'translates' between the Continent and the USA, when he brings the resources of Continental philosophy to bear on particular political and theoretical configurations in North America. This necessarily broaches a number of questions: is this translation adequate? Is it successful? And how could we judge either? What, exactly, happens to key Continental figures when subjected to Connolly's hermeneutics? We may also ask whether Connolly's work always proves productive in speaking across the Atlantic: might his efforts sometimes widen the gap rather than narrowing it?

Politics

One line of inquiry not yet fully pursued in the study of Connolly's political thought concerns the relation between his works and those of other important figures (in roughly the same generation) in, especially, North American political theory. We must ask, then, where and how Connolly's work stands vis-à-vis other thinkers who are responding to the same political problems, but who also insist that they are giving more 'direct' and more 'real' answers to those problems. For his own sake, Connolly might prefer Foucault's 'problemetization' approach over that of problem solving, and he suggests as much (1995). Nevertheless, as readers of his work, we might still wish to sort out the differences in approach and impact between Connolly, on the one hand, and thinkers, for example, like Carole Pateman, Iris Young, and Charles Taylor, on the other. One might argue that the work of these three thinkers has *resounded* more audibly in the political arena. If Young's work speaks to multiculturalism and group differences, and Taylor's work speaks to the politics of recognition, then when/where/how does Connolly's work speak to politics?

Focus

Connolly's writing engages its readers, it resonates with them so much because it speaks so directly to them. But does it speak clearly enough to the political situation, to the broader political system? Is there too much focus on the individual in Connolly's work, such that his far-reaching calls for deep pluralism, for example, turn out to be little more than 'work on the self', strategies offered only to a few and directly affecting even fewer? Does Connolly's valuable turn to 'micropolitics' run the risk of reducing his theorization of politics to philosophizing about the self? Put polemically, does Connolly – despite his best intentions, and certainly despite his own strong critiques of rational choice theory – wind up implicitly supporting a form of methodological individualism?

Disciplinarity

Every text emerges from its own particular situation; this includes both the position of the author and the political configuration of the moment. Thus we may ask of any thinker: how much does his or her work *presuppose* this situation? How much does it project this situation into the context that it otherwise seeks to explore or illuminate? Every thinker runs this risk, simply in speaking from where they stand, but perhaps the dangers are heightened in Connolly's case, precisely because he seeks to be a disciplinary and geographic traveller. How can one cross over into other areas without carrying the assumptions of one's home discipline? Put differently, how does one evade a certain disciplinary imperialism in which the forays into other fields are always conducted in the service of one's primary discipline, i.e. in an effort to bring something valuable back 'home'? This is another way of asking whether and how Connolly's work, or anyone else's, proves genuinely interdisciplinary.

We press here on some of the potential aporias in Connolly's thought, not in an effort to undermine his position but in order to map out future lines of engagement. After all, the publication of this volume should by no means mark any sort of closure with respect to Connolly's work. It should be taken as a call to further engagement.

Part I

The theory of pluralism

1 The challenge to pluralist theory (1969)

The classical theory of pluralism

Pluralism has long provided the dominant description and ideal of American politics. As description, it portrays the system as a balance of power among overlapping economic, religious, ethnic, and geographical groupings. Each "group" has some voice in shaping socially binding decisions; each constrains and is constrained through the processes of mutual group adjustment; and all major groups share a broad system of beliefs and values which encourages conflict to proceed within established channels and allows initial disagreements to dissolve into compromise solutions.

As ideal, the system is celebrated not because it performs any single function perfectly, but because it is said to promote, more effectively than any other known alternative, a plurality of laudable private and public ends. Pluralist politics combines, it is said, the best features from the individualistic liberalism of a John Locke, the social conservatism of an Edmund Burke, and the participatory democracy of a Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

The individual's active involvement in group life enables him to develop the language, deliberative powers, and sense of purpose which make up a fully developed personality. His access to a multiplicity of groups promotes a diversity of experience and interests and enables him to reach alternative power centers if some unit of government or society constrains him.

Society as a whole also benefits from pluralism. The system of multiple group pressures provides reasonable assurance that most important problems and grievances will be channeled to governmental arenas for debate and resolution. The involvement of individuals in politics through group association gives most citizens a stake in the society and helps to generate the loyalties needed to maintain a stable regime with the minimum of coercion. Stability is further promoted, in the long run, because public policy outcomes tend to *reflect* the distribution (balance) of power among groups in the society. Yet, the theory goes, innovation and change are also possible in pluralist politics. New groups, created perhaps by changes in economic processes or population distribution, can articulate new perspectives and preferences which will eventually seep into the balancing process, affecting the shape of political conflicts and the direction of issue resolution.

In short, pluralism has been justified as a system which develops individual capacities, protects individual rights and freedoms, identifies important social problems, and promotes a politics of incremental change while maintaining a long-term stability based on consent.

The legacy of Tocqueville

The intellectual roots of pluralist theory reach back to Aristotle. But James Madison and, especially, Alexis de Tocqueville have provided the intellectual springboards from which many contemporary thinkers have constructed their own formulations.[1] Tocqueville, in describing and justifying American society of the nineteenth century, was careful to stipulate basic preconditions to the successful operation of pluralist politics. Some of these conditions persist today, for example, the universal suffrage, the competing parties, and the independent judiciary that Tocqueville celebrated. There are, however, notable discontinuities between many other conditions he specified and their contemporary equivalents. My purpose here is to ask to what extent twentieth-century society approximates the conditions for an ideal of pluralism formulated a century ago.

A viable pluralism, Tocqueville believed, encourages among its citizens a widespread participation in politics "which originates in the lowest classes … and extends successively to all ranks of society." Such widespread involvement is necessary because "no one will ever believe that a liberal, wise, and energetic government can ever spring from the suffrages of a subservient people."[2] Students of twentieth-century politics, however, are unanimous in concluding that only a small minority of citizens, mostly from upper socioeconomic-educational brackets, participate actively in the political parties and interest groups of contemporary politics.

We need not remind contemporary readers that Tocqueville saw the "voluntary association" as a key agency for developing personality, protecting liberties, and channeling grievances to government. But the emergence of the large-scale, hierarchical organization has significantly altered the character of the voluntary association. It is at least questionable whether this contemporary institution serves as a medium for personality development. It advances the claims of some of its members more forcefully than it does those of others; and the individual's dependence on the structure within which he works may inhibit his opportunities to seek support from other units in times of stress. Moreover, the increased size and formalization required to make the "voluntary association" effective in contemporary politics alter the relationship between members and leaders envisaged by the classical ideal of pluralism. As C. Wright Mills has noted: "Voluntary associations have become larger to the extent that they have become effective; and to just that extent they have become inaccessible to the individual who would shape by discussion the politics of the organization to which he belongs."[3]

The old middle class, whose economic independence and work life encouraged its members to form and participate actively in civil and political associations, is increasingly displaced today by the dependent white collar class. The work life of this new (and allegedly still middle) class resembles that of Tocqueville's "workman" in many respects; it is doubtful whether, on Tocqueville's assumptions, such a work life will foster the breadth of mind needed for responsible citizenship.

> When a workman is increasingly and exclusively engaged in the fabrication of one thing, he ultimately does his work with singular dexterity; but, at the same time, he loses the general faculty of applying his mind to the direction of his work. He every day becomes more adroit and less industrious. In proportion as the principle of the division of labor is more extensively applied the workman becomes more weak, more narrow minded, and more dependent. The art advances, the artisan recedes.[4]

Tocqueville viewed the American frontier as a safety valve for social tensions which could ease the pressure on the balancing process and minimize temptations to supplement the politics of consent with a policy of suppression against discontented minorities. He also viewed the country's relative isolation from foreign concerns as a central factor allowing the system of "decentralized administration" to mute and tame the power of "central government." But the frontier has disappeared today; and the combination of deep involvement in world politics with national problems of economy management, transportation, communication, poverty, urban slums, and ghetto riots has produced a tightening and enlarging of political and administrative processes. Even from Tocqueville's perspective, the stakes of politics are higher today; the earlier safety valves are largely defunct; the contemporary means for the explicit and implicit intimidation of disadvantaged minorities are enhanced.

Tocqueville saw a widely dispersed and locally owned "press" as the most "powerful weapon within every man's reach which the weakest and loneliest of them all may use."[5] But such a press has been replaced today by centralized "media" remote from the individual and certainly more accessible to the privileged and the organized than to the "weakest and loneliest."

We can no longer say with easy confidence that "the American republics use no standing armies to intimidate a discontented minority; but as no minority has as yet been reduced to declare open war, the necessity of an army has not been felt."[6] And we might try to refute, but we can no longer consider irrelevant, Tocqueville's view of the probable relationship between a large military establishment and government:

> All men of military genius are fond of centralization, which increases their strength; and all men of centralizing genius are fond of war,

> which compels nations to combine all their powers in the hands of the government. Thus the democratic tendency which leads men unceasingly to multiply the privileges of the state, and to circumscribe the rights of private persons, is much more rapid and constant amongst those democratic nations which are exposed by their position to great and frequent wars, than amongst all others.[7]

If these structural changes have undermined some of the conditions specified by Tocqueville for the politics of pluralism, perhaps expanded educational opportunities and other new arrangements promote the needed conditions today; perhaps continuities in the electoral and judicial systems, more important in effect than the changes noted in the social and international context of politics, ensure that political pluralism remains fundamentally intact; or perhaps Tocqueville simply misread some of the most significant conditions of pluralism. Perhaps. On the other hand, in our eagerness to fit the comforting doctrine of an earlier period to the present system we might be prone to underplay the adverse ramifications of a new social structure and world environment; we might too easily plesume that functions performed by old institutions in old contexts are still performed by those institutions in their new settings; we might quietly forget some of the functions celebrated in the classical ideal of pluralism and thereby fail to take full account of groups, concerns, and ideals which are not well served by the contemporary balancing process.

Tocqueville clearly realized that institutional evolution could undermine the politics of pluralism. His greatest fear, of course, was the emergence of "majority tyranny." Nevertheless, even while writing well before the period of rapid industrial growth in the United States, he could still point to that minority group which showed the greatest potential to gain ascendancy in the balancing process of the future:

> I am of the opinion, upon the whole, that the manufacturing aristocracy which is growing up under our eyes is one of the harshest which ever existed in the world; but, at the same time, it is one of the most confined and least dangerous. Nevertheless, the friends of democracy should keep their eyes anxiously fixed in this direction; for if ever a permanent inequality of conditions and aristocracy again penetrate into the world, it may be predicted that this is the gate by which they will enter.[8]

Contemporary pluralist theory

The dominant view among social scientists today is that some variant of pluralist theory provides the most adequate framework for understanding the contemporary political process. Two broad "types" of pluralist interpretation can be distinguished. The first, typically advanced by political

scientists, views the government as the *arena* where major group conflicts are debated and resolved. The second, more often advanced by economists and sociologists, sees major social associations, especially organized labor and the corporation, involved in a balancing process which operates largely outside of government; the government acts more as *umpire* than as participant, setting rules for conflict resolution and moving in to redress the imbalance when one group goes too far. I will outline representative expressions of both the *arena* and *umpire* variants of pluralist theory. The summaries will be brief, identifying what I take to be the central thrust of these interpretations. Since relevant qualifications, hedges, and subordinate themes are necessarily given short shrift in a summary of this sort, the reader is referred to the works cited in the references for a more complete statement of both versions of pluralist theory.

The arena theory

Robert Dahl has formulated perhaps the most precise and persuasive interpretation of the arena version of pluralism.[9] Government is the crucial arena for the study of power, says Dahl.

> Government is crucial because its controls are relatively powerful. In a wide variety of situations, in a contest between governmental controls and other controls, the governmental controls will probably prove more decisive than competing controls. … It is reasonable to assume that in a wide variety of situations whoever controls governmental decisions will have significantly greater control over policy than individuals who do not control governmental decisions.[10]

There is no ruling class or power elite which dominates government over a wide range of issues. Rather, there are numerous bases for political power in American society – wealth, prestige, strategic position, voting power – and while each resource is distributed unequally, most identifiable groups in the system have and make use of advantages in one or more of these areas.

The competitive party system plays a major role in maintaining the system of pluralism. Since the "in" party's voting coalition is always threatened by the "out" party's attempts to create new issues which will shift marginal voters to its side both parties constantly strive to increase their support among the major social and sectional groupings in the country. The result is a broad range of "minorities whose preferences must be taken into account by leaders in making policy choices."[11] Any "active" and "legitimate" group can usually "make itself heard at some crucial stage in the process of decision."[12] Or, as Dahl states the point in slightly more restrictive terms later: "few groups in the United States who are *determined* to influence the government – certainly few if any groups who are *organized*, *active*, and

persistent – lack the capacity and opportunity to influence some officials somewhere in the political system in order to obtain at least some of their goals."[13]

Observation of issue resolution in the governmental arenas, then, reveals a decentralized, fragmented bargaining process which involves numerous competing and overlapping minorities. But this bargaining is merely the "chaff" of politics; the social cement and constraints which make peaceful bargaining possible are found elsewhere.

> Prior to politics, beneath it, enveloping it, restricting it, conditioning it, is the underlying consensus on policy that usually exists in the society among a predominant portion of the politically active members. Without such a consensus no democratic system will survive the endless irritations and frustrations of elections and party competition. With such a consensus the disputes over policy alternatives are nearly always winnowed to those within the broad area of basic agreement.[14]

It is true, Dahl agrees, that only a minority of citizens actively participate in politics, but since the active minorities represent a large number of social groupings, since all organized, active, legitimate, and persistent groups have a "voice" in the process, and since the consensus which underlies and controls conflict resolution is a collective product of the whole society (at least of the politically active members), a pluralist system of politics exists.

What desirable functions does the pluralist system perform? Dahl emphasizes its contribution to a stable society based upon minimal coercion and the maximum protection of constitutional rights; it is a "relatively efficient system for reinforcing agreement, encouraging moderation, and maintaining peace in a restless and immoderate people."[15] The system's impact on personality – a central concern of pluralist theorists as diverse as Tocqueville and John Dewey – does not receive close attention from Dahl.

In a recent debate with Jack Walker, Dahl marshalled a series of quotations from his previous publications to show that he has been interested in expanding participation in politics, especially among the lower strata of society. But the statements quoted limit participation to government and view it primarily as a vehicle for channeling existing grievances to governmental arenas. Another tradition of pluralist thought, as we have seen, more directly links participation, the *development* of citizen capacities to translate problems into political issues, and the production of wise political decisions. It also argues that a viable political pluralism requires the expansion of participation beyond government to "the family, the church, business, and the school." Such a "social democracy" is necessary, in John Dewey's view, "from the standpoint both of the general welfare and the full development of human beings as individuals." These claimed linkages are clearly not at the focus of Dahl's analysis; he does not employ them

as standards against which to appraise the performance of the pluralist system. He would not assert, for example, that "social arrangements which involve fixed subordination are maintained by coercion," or that "the very fact of exclusion from participation is a subtle form of oppression."[16]

The umpire theory

Adolf Berle is a representative spokesman for the "umpire" theory of pluralism. His modification of the arena theory flows from a recognition that the technological revolution of the twentieth century has generated massive organizations, especially the large-scale corporation, which initiate unilateral actions outside of the governmental process with important consequences for the society.[17] Berle was among the first in this country to perceive the separation of ownership and control in the large corporation and to ask: To whom or what are the corporate managers accountable today? To preserve the pluralist interpretation of American politics, Berle agrees, he must identify forces which effectively constrain and limit the exercise of corporate power.

The market economy, although not as important as it once was, exerts some constraint on corporate practices. Organized labor also exerts countervailing power in some areas. The corporate elites, implicated in the value system of the larger society, are developing a "corporate conscience" which provides a form of self-restraint on their actions. And if corporate managers step out of line, the government, responsive to the general public, will step in to constrain them. "There is," Berle asserts, "the State, through which action can be compelled. There is the public, increasingly capable of expressing a choice as to what it wants and capable of energizing political forces if the system does not want it."[18] Berle often slips into the rhetoric of majoritarian democracy when discussing the government as a regulator of the large-scale corporation. It is well to note also that he is speaking here primarily of public pressures upon government to change a status quo already achieved by unilateral corporate action, not a politics where the "public" vetoes corporate pressures to change governmental policy.

But how do we decide when the corporation is "out of line"? What are our standards of appraisal, where do they come from, and how do we ascertain whether the market, the corporate conscience, organized labor, and the democratic state are sufficiently constraining the corporation? Berle's answer is clear. Underlying and supporting all of the other constraints is the public consensus, "the body of those general, unstated premises which have come to be accepted."[19] The consensus determines the content of the corporate conscience; it emerges as public support for organized labor or other social groups when corporations push outside their appropriate limits; it provides the energy for citizen pressure upon the government when redress is required. Indeed, the consensus carries a heavier load for Berle than for Dahl; for it not only defines and limits pressures in the governmental

arenas but also operates directly upon the corporate managers, constraining their extra-governmental activities.

But what groups shape these "unstated premises" and who activates the consensus when restraint is needed? All groups contribute to it, including the corporate interests themselves. But "of greater force are the conclusions of *careful* university professors, the *reasoned* opinions of specialists, the statements of *responsible* journalists, and at times, the *solid* pronouncements of *respected* politicians. … Taken together, this group, so long as its members are able to communicate their views, becomes the forum of accountability. … Collectively they are the developers of the public consensus."[20]

Berle's conclusions are still difficult to pin down. For what criteria determine which pronouncements are careful, reasoned, solid, and respected? Which segments of society are most involved in bestowing "respect" upon those who develop and defend the public consensus? What *concerns* are most prominent among the selected group of intellectuals, specialists, and politicans? How does Berle decide that his "group" has more influence on the consensus than, for example, businessmen and corporate managers?

The "consensus," for both Berle and Dahl, is the most important force sustaining political pluralism. It is also a factor which each theorist subjects to minimal examination.[21]

A critique of pluralist theory

Even the sharpest critics of pluralist theory agree that the politics of balance is a highly visible feature of American politics, and most critics acknowledge that it plays some role of substance in the total system. Further, many of the critics believe that pluralist principles must be included in any ideal of politics relevant to contemporary society.

The critics see organized groups competing within governmental arenas; they typically agree that the mass media, although definitely biased, present a significantly wider range of information and opinion than found in countries operating under a one-party system; they acknowledge that freedoms of association, assembly, speech, and religion are comparatively well protected here even after one has corrected for the gap between official rhetoric and established practice.

On this view, the conventional pluralist interpretation is not so much wrong as it is systematically misleading. For conventional pluralist theory focuses on the *competition of elites* operating within a "given" framework or context while the critics believe that a more accurate picture results when one examines the *biased context* or the "other face of power"[22] within which elite competition occurs. The class structure which helps to provide the social context for elite competition;[23] the "groups" whose lack of organization, persistence, and legitimacy rules them out of (or marginally in) the balancing process; the concerns, potentially of interest to many or

all segments of society, which are not carried by organized groups to the governmental arenas – these are the background features of pluralist politics which receive the attention of the critics. It is difficult to observe and weigh these factors, but as we have seen in our summary of pluralist theory, assumptions must be made at this level anyway. The critics, at the very least, refuse to shove these considerations into a residual category called the "consensus."

The late C. Wright Mills launched an early and polemical critique of pluralist theory, adopting a style and terminology which conveyed his outrage at the gap between the practice and promise of American politics. The polemical style, however, weakened the coherence of his formulations and opened his position to the kind of stereotyping which allows criticized scholars to ignore the challenge presented. Mills sought to call attention to the biased context of pluralist politics. He reminded us that "the goals for which interests struggle are not merely given; they reflect the current state of expectation and acceptance."[24] Many viable alternatives and potential issues, he contended, do not reach the governmental arenas and thus do not become part of the observable balancing process:

> Only one more point of definition: absence of public issues there may well be, but this is not due to any absence of problems. Impersonal and structural changes have not eliminated problems or issues. Their absence from many discussions – that *is* an ideological condition, regulated in the first place by whether or not intellectuals detect and state problems as potential *issues* for probable publics, and as *troubles* for a variety of individuals.[25]

Mills' view, stated in the terminology of Berle and Dahl, is that for some segments of society the prevailing consensus does not provide an adequate perspective or level of awareness with which to locate the structural causes of their vague feelings of anxiety, malaise, frustration, and resentment. As a result, undifferentiated "troubles" are not stated as clear-cut grievances; potential preferences are not organized as public issues; possible issues are not debated and resolved within governmental arenas. The linkages between private troubles and public issues are highly biased: some segments of society, such as the impoverished, the blacks, unorganized laborers, and many white collar workers, have not even developed a "voice" which can be "heard" on matters of great import for their lives; some kinds of concerns, affecting most or all segments of society, are not channeled to public arenas for debate.

Whose problems and claims does the system favor? Mills' theory of the "power elite" is that corporate managers and military leaders are developing a community of interests in maintaining certain status quo arrangements. They effectively protect, inside and outside of government, the prevailing distribution of wealth and income; corporate management's control over the

organization of work life, price levels, investments, expansion, and mergers; a tax structure favorable to wealthy capital holders; the status and growth of the military establishment. Mills contends that policy modifications in these areas are possible which would benefit wide segments of the society psychologically and materially. But such possibilities are not considered as viable options because of the power elite's influence over the "consensus" accepted by the vast majority of American citizens.

Mills' positive argument for the power elite, as opposed to the pointed critique of areas of analysis omitted from consideration in pluralist theory, is marked by unsupported gaps covered by rhetorical flourish. One point is worthy of emphasis, however. It is possible to combine elements from the "umpire" theory of Berle and the "arena" theory of Dahl to support Mills' view that the pluralist system is significantly biased toward the concerns and priorities of corporate elites. Corporate managers (1) possess tremendous *initiating* power *outside* of government; (2) possess rather effective *veto* power *within* government which can be used to protect their unilateral initiatives in issue areas of greatest concern to them; and (3) are beneficiaries of a *biased consensus* which lends legitimacy to their initiatives and veto power while diminishing it for groups which might otherwise seek to challenge prevailing practices.[26] The interpretation supported by these considerations is not one of a hard line power elite "whose preferences," as Dahl expresses it, "regularly prevail in cases of difference in preference in key political issues."[27] Rather, they support an interpretation of a biased pluralism in which some concerns, aspirations, and interests are privileged while others are placed at a serious disadvantage.[28]

Other recent criticisms of conventional pluralist theory move along similar lines. Henry Kariel[29] points to the oligarchical tendencies within those large organizations which function both as interest groups affecting governmental policy and as agencies taking unilateral action of public consequence. Organizations such as the American Medical Association, labor unions, large corporations and The Farm Bureau achieve a quasi-official status within government as the legitimate representatives of physicans, blue collar workers, corporate managers and stockholders, and farmers. But in fact each unit speaks for a segment of its claimed constituency while presuming to speak for all. The government, in this interpretation, is not a neutral reflection of interests in the society, nor is it primarily a countervailing force acting for those interests and concerns which are severely disadvantaged. By co-opting legitimate interest group elites as the official spokesmen for broad segments of society, the government helps to freeze the status quo, making it difficult for "members" in these imperatively coordinated associations to challenge their "leaders" without risking legally supported internal sanctions.

In addition, the old constellations of interest groups take on a special legitimacy in the balancing process, and citizens with new problems and concerns encounter serious institutional and ideological obstructions to the formation of new organized groups which might express their aspirations.

The middle level white collar worker and the unorganized blue collar worker, for example, are marginally represented by corporate and labor interests, yet they are classified under these categories. As Robert Paul Wolff observes: "The application of the theory of pluralism always favors the groups in existence against those in the process of formation."[30]

Critics such as Herbert Marcuse, Grant McConnell, and John Kenneth Galbraith join Mills and Kariel in stressing the extent to which pluralist politics today is "one dimensional."[31] Not only are the issues generated by competing groups constrained by established values and expectations (ideological constraints), but contemporary social structure encourages groups to organize around occupational categories while inhibiting effective political organization on the basis of other considerations. These structural constraints reinforce rather than mitigate existing ideological constraints.

The highest priority claims of each occupational group aim at enhancing the status and economic position of its core membership. Even if all occupational categories were well represented in the pressure system, the balancing process itself would tend to focus on the government's allocation of economic security and benefits while relegating to the periphery of attention other dimensions of private and public life affected by the decisions and nondecisions of government. Thus a bias in the very slicing of "groups" contributes to a "pattern of *one dimensional thought* and *behavior* in which ideas, aspirations, and objectives that, by their content, transcend the established universe of discourse and action are either repelled or reduced to terms of this universe.[32]

One-dimensional pluralist politics suppresses exploration of alternatives by proliferating issues within a narrow range of concerns. The impact on personality of a stultifying work life, the ugliness of our cities, the inadequate provisions for public transportation, the limited opportunity for most individuals to participate in the decision-making processes of the localities and organizations within which they are implicated, the societal consequences of planned obsolescence – these "issues," affected by the decisions that are made and could be made, are not among the high priority issues generated by the "clash and clang" of effectively mobilized groups.

Similarly, military, corporate, and labor interests press for defense expenditures to maximize the income and status of their particular constituencies. But where are the groups of comparable stature which press to ensure that total defense expenditures are maintained at the minimum level needed to protect national security? It is admittedly difficult to judge the minimal level of defense expenditures needed, but the point is that this very question is not readily incorporated into the balancing process; an "answer" emerges which reflects more the aggregation of particular interests than a debate over the question itself.[33] Mitigating forces are at work here, we hope. But the example illuminates a point too often overlooked by the celebrants of pluralist practice: the aggregation of organized interests does not always ensure that the public interest is well served.[34]

These critiques of pluralist theory, then, tend to converge around a small cluster of themes. Since there is some confusion about the kinds of claims the critics are advancing, it may be useful to list them in a formal way here, starting with those which point to gaps between pluralist rhetoric and pluralist practice and building to those which imply the need to revise some features of the pluralist ideal itself.

1. The prevailing system inhibits some segments of society from efficacious involvement in the balancing process while bestowing cumulative advantages upon other segments.
2. The process of interest aggregation ignores some concerns explicitly shared by many citizens because persistent, active, and legitimate "groups" fail to define these concerns as high priority interests. This condition could persist even if every citizen belonged to at least one politically effective group.
3. Many *latent concerns* – those which might well interest wide segments of society if they were publicaly articulated as issues – are not identified or sharply defined by the prevailing system of issue formation.
4. Work life and decision-making processes within those territorial and functional units which underpin modern pluralism are often not conducive to that personality development which both enhances life for the individual and enables a political system to avoid the potentially debilitating effects of widespread apathy underlaid by simmering hostility and resentment.
5. The status quo biases in the prevailing system of issue-formation and conflict-resolution discourage efforts within recognized channels to (*a*) increase "out" group involvement in the balancing process, (*b*) and (*c*) bring unorganized and unarticulated concerns to political arenas, and (*d*) initiate reforms *within* organizations designed to foster personality development. Thus, as a rapidly expanding technology promotes equally rapid social change, ideological and institutional constraints in the political system inhibit efforts to cope with the accompanying dislocations.

These claims, clearly, can be formulated as empirical hypotheses and subjected to at least partial test. The relative lack of such efforts suggests that skilled methodologists have seldom been excited by these questions while interested critics have only recently begun to move beyond general criticism to the work of conceptual clarification and empirical verification.

The critical temper

The disparities among the critics of contemporary pluralist theory should be clear enough. Mills and Marcuse, when compared to Galbraith, Kariel, and McConnell, are more thoroughly critical of the existing system, more