1

Politics and Vision

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Political Theory and the Political

To study political theory in 1960 was to participate in an enterprise widely thought to be moribund. The air was thick with funeral orations. Because a new science of politics was on the verge of consolidation, political theory in the "normative" or "traditional" sense had become unnecessary. The old theory was speculative and impressionistic, while the new science would be rigorous and testable; the old mixed the descriptive and the normative, while the new would separate them rigorously; the old was too historical in focus, while the new science of lawful regularities tied to predictable events would be drawn from observable evidence in the present. Some interesting questions in the venerable texts might be convertible into testable hypotheses, but in the main and for the most part political theory was in the way and on the way out. Sure, the shape of the future science was still marked by uncertainty. Several "models" competed for hegemony. There was public choice theory, decision-making theory, systems theory, power theory, communications theory, structural-functionalism, and so on. But, as David Easton put it in a formulation marked by his typical politeness, these perspectives were united in their opposition to traditional theory and bound together by precepts conveyed best by the word behavioralism:

> The behavioral approach testifies to the coming of age of theory in the social sciences as a whole, wedded, however, to a commitment to the assumptions and methods of empirical science. Unlike the great traditional theories of past political thought, new theory tends to be analytic, not substantive, explanatory rather than ethical, more general and less particular. That portion of political research which shares those commitments to both the new theory and the technical means of analysis and verification thereby links political science to broader behavioral tendencies in the social sciences; hence, its description as political behavior.[1]

The title of a 1961 essay by Isaiah Berlin, "Does Political Theory Still Exist?" well conveys the sense of beleaguerment felt by many theorists. Berlin conceded much as he carved out a space for theory, for he did not

have access to the critique of the positivist model of the natural sciences soon to be published by Thomas Kuhn and Steven Toulmin. Nor was he yet exposed to the conception of natural science to be developed by Nobel Prize–winning chemist Ilya Prigogine in the 1970s. Prigogine would later contend that nature itself is populated more by "dissipative structures" than by the timeless systems of Newtonian mechanics. A dissipative structure, exemplified by cells, whirlpools, biological evolution, aging, and the evolution of the universe, has self-productive capacities; it is marked by irreversible changes that give it a temporal or historical dimension; and it is susceptible to changes in the course of its development that are unpredictable.[2] A dissipative structure in nonhuman nature, that is, already exceeds the conception of *human* behavior and institutional life accepted by most behavioralists in Berlin's day. On the other hand, bad memories of behavioralist reductionism still lingering in the hearts and minds of political theorists discourage too many from engaging the place of human corporeality in the dense texture of culture and exploring the implications such a layered conception of culture might carry for thinking, judgment, identity, ethics, and conflict in politics. While most political theorists advance conceptions of consciousness, language, and intersubjectivity that rise above the dull regularity of an earlier behavioralism, too many remain so burned by the behavioral reductions of matter, nature, corporeality, and sensibility that they fail to fold sophisticated understandings of corporeality into political thought. Conceptions of language, freedom, identity, and difference will advance considerably as dynamic conceptions of matter, biology, and human corporeality are curled into them.

But Berlin, as I said, lacked access to such perspectives. Conveying a sense of bewilderment with the overweening confidence of behavioralism, he sought to carve out a specific *domain* for political theory.

> But I should like to say once again that unless political theory is conceived in narrowly sociological terms, it differs from political science or any other empirical inquiry in being concerned with somewhat different fields; namely with such questions as what is specifically human and what is not, and why; whether specific categories, say those of purpose or of belonging to a group or of law, are indispensable to understanding what men are; and so inevitably, with the source, scope and validity of certain human goals.[3]

This defense of the theory enterprise, while containing promising formulations, was doomed to be translated by its opponents into the idea that while "facts" can be explained, "values" remain outside the province of the scientific enterprise. Once so translated, scientists-in-waiting were eager to agree to its terms. Berlin's defense of theory acquires more density when he insists that "our political notions are part of our conception of what it is to be human, and this is not solely a question of fact, as facts

are conceived by the natural sciences; nor the product of conscious reflection upon the discoveries of anthropology or sociology or psychology, although all these are relevant and indeed indispensable to an adequate notion of the nature of man in general."[4] The effect intersubjective conceptions of ourselves can have upon who we are and how we behave throws a wrench into the predictive aspirations of the behavioral model. For a new theory of behavior, once engaged by those whose conduct it explains, might infiltrate into their understandings and conduct in ways that unsettle the original explanation or spark new courses of action beyond the imagination of the explainers. This possibility is endemic as long as the line of communication between explainers and explainees is not closed by political means, for the concepts human actors have about themselves, as Berlin says, enter into the very constitution of their actions and practices.

But Berlin hesitates to push this theme. The last half of the sentence in question almost reinstates a division of labor between political scientists and political theorists in which the conception of science projected by behaviorialists is honored when confined to its proper domain. The identity of the aggressors, we can see in retrospect, filtered into the self-identification of the resistance. This Stockholm Effect shows that the self-reflexive loop can have stultifying as well as emancipating effects. Berlin's defensive effort to carve out a restrictive domain for theory exemplifies a larger set of such attempts during this same period.[5]

Berlin, recall, asks whether political theory *still* exists. That little word speaks volumes: "I still believe; I still demand; I still hope; I still exist." In each case the affirmative verb is diminished by the "still" appended to it, but particularly in the last instance. So when it qualifies the very existence of theory, that enterprise is reduced to a transparency of itself. "Political theory still exists." The ghost acquires a little color, however, when Berlin finally turns to the role of history in political thought. We cannot know very much about the ideas and concepts governing us, he insists, unless we compare them to those set in different times and places. Those comparisons in turn do not run deep unless the best perspectives in one era are compared to the most profound visions in others. The balance between continuity and differentiation across time becomes difficult to assess when you attempt such temporal comparisons, but the potential payoff is impressive. You are gradually drawn toward "second order statements" that do not fit neatly into the category either of fact or of value. You can now explore deep, persistent questions about humanity, legitimacy, virtue, authority, and politics, questions "which if not eternal and universal, are far more stable and widespread than those of the sciences, sufficiently continuous, indeed, to constitute a common world which we share with medieval and classical thinkers."[6] It is from these

connections and differentiations across time that the most significant spurs to contemporary political thought arise.

The concerns, anxieties, and promise discernible in Berlin's essay tell a lot about the predicament of political theory in the early 1960s in English-speaking countries. He, like numerous theorists who read his essay, internalized several problematical assumptions of those who pronounced the enterprise dead. And yet his involvement in the history of political thought allowed him to rise above those internalizations to some degree.

The impressive thing about *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought*, published by Sheldon Wolin in 1960, is that it carries Berlin's effort several steps farther under the same circumstances of duress. *Politics and Vision* did not simply tell us how important it is to address the "tradition" of Western political thought, it engaged comparatively a series of exemplary political thinkers in pre-Christian thought, Christendom, and the modern world in a way that revivified the energy, confidence, and vision of an entire generation of political theorists. The book does not tarry long over obstacles and barriers to the theory enterprise, though its brief references to these matters were amply appreciated by young readers who gobbled them up. One mark of its significance is that for at least three decades after its publication a horde of graduate students studying for comprehensive examinations in political theory used it as a primary source of guidance and inspiration. And who knows how many assistant professors have modeled their introductory theory courses on it? I could name one, at least. Others can confess on their own time.

Wolin begins *Politics and Vision* with a preview of the theory enterprise as he practices it. We know that politics is the clash and clang of different interests and ideals in public life. But what is "the political"? "What is it that distinguishes, say, political authority from other forms of authority, or membership in a political society from membership in other forms of association?"[7] Whatever the political was and has become, the tradition of political theory, extending from at least Plato to the present, has played a significant role in crafting it and carrying its insights forward. To study Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and Mill critically and comparatively, as Wolin does in this book, is to help clarify what the political has been, how it has been debated and revised, what turns on these debates and revisions, and what changes might be made in its contemporary compass. "From its very beginnings in Greece, the Western political tradition has looked upon the political order as a common order created to deal with those concerns in which all of the members of society have some interest."[8]

The first lengthy quotation in *Politics and Vision* is a passage from Plato's *Protagoras*. The statement points to the significance and persistence of the question of the political in human affairs. In the Dialogue, the gods are concerned that "men would destroy each other" unless they were provided with "justice and virtue."

> Zeus feared that the entire race would be exterminated, and so he sent Hermes to them, bearing reverence and justice to be the ordering principles of cities and the bonds of friendship and conciliating. Hermes asked Zeus how he should impart justice and reverence among men:—Should he distribute them as the arts are distributed; that is to say, to a favored few only [or] . . . to all? "To all," said Zeus. "I should like them all to have a share; for cities cannot exist, if a few share only in the virtues, as in the arts."[9]

This quotation points to a persistent theme in Wolin's work and, perhaps, to a stubborn tension inside it. First, it dramatizes the internal connection between the political, the common, the ordinary, and the people. Second, it symbolizes the difficulty of acquiring the needed capacities by having the gods bestow them on the people from above. But, third, by setting these terms in a polytheistic rather than a monotheistic context Wolin hesitates to build too much unity, identity, or uniformity into them; he maintains room for the evanescence of the new through the creativity of ordinary people. And, fourth, the linkages between polytheism, plurality, and commonality also express in embryo a Wolinesque tendency to downgrade questions about the divine source, transcendental ground, final end, or contractual basis of authority, justice, legitimacy, and membership in favor of a living, immanent, and engaged politics of commonality. The gods bestow a gift. They do not issue a command or install a necessary logic. This last protocol is important. For if the people are tightly governed by a prior moral order, their own agency is confined and delimited. But if the people do not have a certain element of commonality there will be little opportunity for the political to find expression through it. Whatever the common and the political become as Wolin's journey unfolds, the tension inside these ideas continues to reverberate. These tensions, you might even say, are part of the political, particularly as it finds expression through "Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought."

The thinking of epic theorists is reducible neither to the category of the "normative" nor to that of the "descriptive." Rather, they conjure visions of the political that extend our imaginations and enable us to pursue possibilities that would otherwise be lost. To enhance our imagination of the possible, even to inspire *us* to bring something new into being, they are often required to exaggerate certain tendencies in the present.

We can easily dispose of the possibility that political theorists were unaware that they were injecting imagination or fancy into their theories. Rather, they believed that fancy, exaggeration, even extravagance, sometimes permit us to see things that are not otherwise apparent. The imaginative element has played a role in political philosophy similar to that Coleridge assigned to imagination in poetry, an "esemplastic" power that "forms all into one graceful intelligent whole" . . . Fancy neither proves nor disproves; it seeks, instead, to illuminate, to help us become wiser about political things.[10]

After treating us to several chapters on what the political has become in the hands of theorists of Greek life, Christendom, and early modern liberalism, Wolin turns in the last chapter to contemporary forces that promote a sublimation of the political. He contends that the political has become diffused into a series of corporate, constitutional, organizational estates that pull politics away from a common set of concerns. Adopting a strategy that would later become identified to different effect with the work of Michel Foucault, Wolin argues that the searches for community and rational organization, generally taken to be contending responses to the alienation of modern life, combine functionally to sublimate the political. "My premise is that the ideas which have significantly influenced our political and social world, and shaped the way we interpret it, represent a blend of the theories of a highly diverse group of writers. In the way we understand the world we are partly the debtors of Marx, but also of de Maistre, partly of Lenin and also of managerialism."[11] When you add Rousseau and Saint-Simon to the list, as Wolin eventually does, you have the makings of a modern world in which political involvement with the highest interests of the polity dissolves into apolitical modes of management and parochial sites of belonging. Even modern constitutional theory participates in the politics of sublimation.

During the past two centuries the vision of political theory has been a disintegrating one, consistently working to destroy the idea that society ought properly to be considered as a whole and that its general life was best expressed through political forms. . . . This has been done by reducing the political association to the level of other associations at the same time that the latter have been elevated to the level of the political order and endowed with many of its characteristics and values.[12]

The task is to reestablish a practice of citizenship that raises people above the particular roles they play in work, family, investment, consumption, and religion. The urgency of the task is clear, for it "is the political order that is making fateful decisions about man's survival in an age haunted by the possibility of unlimited destruction."[13]

The Sins of Methodism

Wolin's *Politics and Vision* closes on a plaintive note, then. But he returned to these issues in a 1969 essay that became as important to theorists of the day as the book. While he had initially treated the quest for community and organization as twin sources of the sublimation of the political, in the new essay the nexus between methodism in political science and the character of political education assumes center stage. The behavioralism Wolin had tried to bracket in 1960 now plays such an important role in university life that it poses a threat to political education itself. It may seem that to give primacy to method in political research simply impoverishes the quality of research. Wolin thinks otherwise. Intimating an affinity between Christian methodism and behaviorist faith, Wolin says " 'Methodism' is ultimately a proposal for shaping the mind."[14] How so? The demand to reduce large ideas to testable hypothesis, to eliminate personal "bias" in your research, to develop refined statistical skills, and to state your findings as lawful regularities is not only to take valuable time away from acquiring more refined skills, it is also to lose touch with the cultural wisdom already stored in you as "tacit knowledge." Moreover, in order to sustain their contestable faith in lawful regularities, behavioralists are pressed to advance schemes of education, research, and professional induction that actually help to manufacture such regularities. Methodism secretes a politics that insinuates regularities into the dense culture otherwise replete with pivotal moments of surprise and creativity. In this essay, Wolin suggests how and why the apparently neutral commitment to the primacy of method so often goes together with an operational politics of narrow pragmatism, complacent centrism, and what later would come to be called the politics of normalization.

> Such a political world snugly fits the methodist's need, not only for the security it provides for his investigations, but also for the assured regularities it gives him to investigate. . . . What sort of political commitment is likely from a self which has been purged of inherited notions [and] pledged to the support of existing political and moral schemes? . . . A self of this type is likely to treat politics and morals in a way that avoids fundamental criticism as a fundamental commitment.[15]

Much of the essay consists of quotations from leading practitioners of the day to document the actuality of this connection. Wolin thus gives the lie to the separation between facts and values by exploring how the primacy of method insinuates itself into the political sensibility of researchers and the mode of political education they support. No wonder some behavioralists still shudder when his name comes up.

Political education, for Wolin himself, is intimately bound to the acquisition, dissemination, and improvement of tacit knowledge. Tacit knowledge, by its very character, is not fully available to explicit formulation. It is embedded in visceral habits of perception and experience, expressed in institutional presumptions, and modified through engagement with profound theories of politics in other times and places. Tacit knowledge is not only crucial to creativity in political thought, it is anathema to the primacy of method in political research and education. As Wolin plays out these points, he returns to the primacy of vision in political theory.

> Vision, as I have tried to emphasize, depends for its richness on the resources from which it can draw. These extra-scientific considerations may be identified more explicitly as the stock of ideas which an intellectually curious person accumulates and which come to govern his intuitions, feelings, and perceptions. They constitute the sources of his creativity, yet rarely find explicit expression in formal theory. Lying beyond the boundaries circumscribed by method, technique and the official definition of a discipline, they can be summarized as cultural resources and itemized as metaphysics, faith, historical sensibility, or more broadly, as tacit knowledge. Because these matters bear a family resemblance to "bias" they become sacrificial victim to the quest for objectivity in the social sciences.[16]

The above formulation displays Wolin's vision of political education in action. At the beginning of the essay Wolin linked, casually at first, three issues commonly held apart: the primacy of method, the conception of the political it secretes, and the character of political education it supports. Then, moving back and forth across these themes, he prepares you for a compact formulation that may leave a permanent mark on your thinking. You might dissent from it in some respect, but if so, it now becomes clear how much work you must do to make your claim worthy of attention. Wolin, in short, performs the political education he preaches. In the case before us he deepens our appreciation of the ubiquity of tacit knowledge, recalls how it finds variable modes of expression in the fabric of our "intuitions, feelings, and perceptions," and shows how methodism eviscerates that wisdom through the reduction of knowledge to explicit formulation, the contraction of tradition to "bias" and the compression of education to formal training. It seems less likely (to me) that the tacit dimension is eviscerated by the methodical strictures noted, but more likely that these practices themselves enter into a politics of normalization operating below the threshold of substantive formulation or explicit moral judgment.

The celebration of tacit knowledge finds its most confident and dense expression in a conservative temper, one that enacts modest modifications upon an intimate tradition carried across long, slow time. But Wolin, un-

like Burke and Oakeshott, and like Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche, joins the tacit dimension to a theme in partial tension with it. Sometimes people live, he says, in a system that is "systematically deranged." The *depth* of that derangement, it seems, is due to the tacit dimension itself. Today, Wolin thinks, we live in a system that contains systematic injustices and imbalances. Because the tacit dimension is sedimented into perceptions, feelings, visceral judgments, and institutional dispositions, some of it, we can now see, consists of intuitive prejudices that make powerful claims upon our judgments and identities. Methodism is merely one of them.

Wolin's tendency to dismiss "technique" in general and his (later) resistance to a genealogical element in political interpretation may become a liability here. For genealogy, while surely *insufficient* to politics and political education, is nonetheless important to a world in which systematic injustice flows into the material sedimentations of tacit knowledge. It is a critical strategy by which to excavate and partially disassemble a subset of tacit prejudices in circumstances when you have come to suspect that they impose hidden injuries upon minority constituencies. Genealogy reaches more deeply into the visceral register than, say, simple deliberation. And it addresses more profoundly than the disembodied logic of "immanent critique" the flow of corporeal charges into visceral patterns of judgment. Wolin himself practices a thoughtful variety of that art from time to time, as in the last chapter of *Politics and Vision*, and in the subterranean linkages he uncovers in the essay before us between commitment to methodism and a dull model of political education.

What, though, are you to *do* if and when elements in your tacit knowledge now appear to you as habits, feelings, or visceral judgments in need of modification? Are you to will them away? Try that with smoking and drinking, or even with trying not to call a lover who has just rejected you. Are you to dissolve them through the power of pure deliberation? Try that with the same things. Is Wolin, for god's sake, simply a deliberative democrat?

Suppose you become wary of the sense of disgust or panic you feel in your gut when, say, atheists or gays articulate their orientations to death, marriage, or sex in public forums. The gut, we now know, contains a simple cortical organization; and the cultural transactions through which it is organized issue in thought-imbued intensities that make powerful claims upon your habits, actions, and intellectual judgments. Such heartfelt intuitions may not be movable by will or deliberation alone, then. But they might yield a little to arts of the self and micropolitical practices that enact new versions of those interactions between sound, feeling, image, touch, concept, and belief through which the intuitions were organized in the first place. I have pursued the *constitutive connection* between political education and micropolitics elsewhere. But Wolin's em-

phasis on the relation between tacit knowledge and political education also invites exploration of the connections between these arts and the practices he commends.

Perhaps Wolin could pursue such arts while linking them to the politics of attunement articulated nobly by Charles Taylor and Fred Dallmayr in the mono-theo-teleological tradition. The teleological democrats pursue an intrinsic, if plastic, purpose within tacit knowledge itself, while post-Nietzschean democrats contend that the undesigned character and element of mobility in the immanent register render it susceptible to patterns of consolidation and habituation that may vary significantly within and across political cultures. Endorsement of a teleological metaphysic would give hegemony to the common in Wolin's conception of the political, rather than focusing on the difficult and uncertain task of opening and reopening the question of how to negotiate between the dictates of the common and the pressures of the new in specific contexts. But if the quotation from Zeus cited earlier carries as much weight as I attribute to it, there are sharp limits to how far Wolin can go in connecting tacit knowledge to an intrinsic purpose of being. When Wolin's engagement with the role of tacit knowledge is joined to his pagan appreciation of a deep plurality of being he is pulled toward inserting into the very idea of the political a constitutive tension between established commonality and the politics of becoming. That seems to square with the texts we have examined so far. But if it does, why does Wolin act in his later work as if those who explicitly address this constitutive tension in the political only pay attention to the register of becoming, difference, and diversity? Does this new charge reflect his response to a changed political context or a shift in his basic orientation to politics?

Tacit knowledge, Wolin says, contains an element of faith and metaphysics. This acknowledgment places him at odds with contemporaries such as Dworkin, Rawls, Rorty, and Habermas who celebrate late modernity as a time when metaphysics has been laid to rest or shuffled into the background. But it also opens up a potential dialogue between him and those who bring critical metaphysical orientations to engagement with the tacit dimension of politics. The names George Kateb, Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Henri Bergson, William James, Wendy Brown, Richard Flathman, Sheldon Wolin, Hanna Pitkin, Steven White, Michael Oakeshott, Martin Heidegger, Hans Gadamer, Charles Taylor, and Fred Dallmayr merely indicate the liveliness of these issues and the diversity of contemporary orientations to them. If you add Emmanuel Levinas to the list, as Aryeh Botwinick does, and if you recall that both James and Bergson affirmed a nonteleological conception of divinity, it can be seen that the position you assume on the intrinsic diversity or purpose of being is not necessarily aligned with the one you affirm on

atheism, monotheism, or polytheism. For Levinas, on Aryeh Botwinick's reading, embraces a fugitive monotheism that respects a diversity of being. So do Bergson and James on mine.

Significant as these different renderings of the tacit dimension may be for the vision of politics you endorse, even more pertinent are the compelling *connections* between them. For inside these variable renderings of the tacit dimension, the best ways to move it, and the fundamental character of being in which it is set, all these theorists *converge* with Wolin in giving prominence to a tacit dimension of politics, the density of theory, the complexity of political education, and the layered character of political engagement.

Today, debates over the relation between methods of research and political education posed so brilliantly by Wolin in "The Vocation of Political Theory" no longer assume the dualism of a contest between "political theorists" and "political scientists." Thanks in no small part to Wolin, the layered character of political culture is now explored in several ways by political theorists. And numerous students of comparative politics, international relations, and American politics also appreciate the tacit dimensions of political life. They strive to incorporate that understanding into their interpretive work. The old debate between methodists and educationists now proceeds inside "subfields" of political science as well as between them.

Fugitive Democracy

The essay on political education deferred the issue of the political posed so sharply in *Politics and Vision*, even though it could be heard rumbling offstage. The political returns to center stage, however, in Wolin's most recent work. We shall examine it in the context of "Fugitive Democracy," an essay published in 1996. The continuity in Wolin's thought is suggested by the definitions with which he begins.

> I shall take the *political* to be an expression of the idea that a free society composed of diversities can nonetheless enjoy moments of commonality when, through public deliberations, collective power is used to promote or protect the well being of the collectivity. *Politics* refers to the legitimized public contestation, primarily by organized and unequal social powers, over access to the resources available to the public authorities of the collectivity. Politics is continuous, ceaseless, and endless. In contrast, the political is episodic, rare.[17]

This continuity, however, is compromised to some degree by the mood of disappointment that seems to pervade the essay. While the political retains its centrality, it is now said to be episodic and rare in essence. It

is linked closely to democratic energies, which are themselves limited to episodic appearances in the late-modern age. Why? Well, first, there is the dominance of the corporate sector, inside and outside the state. Its independent market powers and presumptive governmental prerogatives create steep obstacles to economic equality and ecological protection that might otherwise emerge from the common experience of citizens. The globalization of economic life adds another layer of obstacles. Then there is, Wolin says, the prominence of constitutionalism. A constitutional regime also guards the state from the ebullience and unpredictability of the people: "In sum a constitution regulates the amount of democratic politics that is let in."[18] Finally, a new entrant into the antipolitical canopy now appears, the "postmodern" sensibility that has swept through the academy and infiltrated social movements, the media, film, and international conferences. Wolin articulates the pernicious effects of the postmodern several times.

> Postmodern cultural politics follows in the footsteps of nationalism in insisting upon boundaries that establish differences (as in gender or racial politics) but proclaim identities as well. Here, too, the political becomes associated with purification or, more precisely, a reversal in which the stigma of impurity as well as the badge of purity is switched so that the pariah or victimized group is now pure, even innocent, while the dominant group is impure.
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> Thus whereas boundaries signified to the early modern the limits of the political, to the postmodern they are a sign of its limitations. . . . The highest political expression of the postmodern ideal is of a Rio Conference where the representatives of boundary-transcending human interests meet face-to-face with representatives of sovereign states.
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> The many phenomena that seem to escape or transcend boundaries, for example electronic communications, are often cited as confirmation of the real existence of the postmodern. If such is the case, then that development may shed some light not only of the future of the state, and its conception of the political, but also on the democratic or nondemocratic tendency of the postmodern.[19]

One could modulate these formulations by citing "postmodern" critiques of the politics of purity, engagements with the ambiguity of identities and boundaries, and explorations of multiple sites of political action, including local actions, social movements aimed at the state, and cross-national, nonstatist movements in support of ecology, gender rights, and so on. But let us set the accuracy of Wolin's representation aside for now in favor of another question. He has already told us that epic theorists use "fancy, exaggeration, even extravagance sometimes" to allow us to "see things that are not otherwise apparent." What is Wolin getting at through his extravagance?

Wolin's anxiety is that the postmodern focus on "difference" adds another obstacle to democratic action on behalf of common needs. Wolin himself supports "diversity," but he also insists that its preconditions of existence involve a politics of the common. Ironically, the formulations through which he now expresses this combination bear a family resemblance to those advanced by some theorists he would call postmodern, even though the inflections differ. Let us listen to a few formulations in which he negotiates the interdependence and tension between discovering the common and creating new commonalities, respecting old boundaries and installing new ones, and pursuing grassroots initiatives and addressing the multiple sites of political agency above the local to which they must also speak:

> But throughout history it is not difficult to identify the social groups whose interests have been consistently exploited so as to render commonality a mockery; it has been the same groups that have been excluded from active participation in the political.
>
> Revolutions activate the demos and destroy boundaries that bar access to political experience. Individuals from the excluded social strata take on responsibilities, deliberate about goals and choices and share in decisions that have broad consequences and affect unknown and distant others.
>
> Yet it may be argued that a belief in the restorative power of democracy is still part of the American political consciousness. Certain events support that belief: the recurrent experience of constituting political societies . . . beginning with colonial times and extending through the Revolution and beyond to the westward migrations . . . ; the movement to abolish slavery and the abortive effort at reconstructing American life on the basis of racial equality; the Populist and agrarian revolts of the nineteenth century; the struggle for autonomous trade unions and for women's rights; the civil rights movement of the 1960's and the antiwar, anti-nuclear and ecological movements of recent decades.
>
> The possibility of renewal draws on a simple fact that ordinary individuals are capable of creating new cultural patterns of commonality at any moment. Individuals who concert their powers for low income housing, worker ownership of factories, better schools, better health care, safer water, . . . and a thousand other common concerns of ordinary lives are experiencing a democratic moment and contributing to the discovery, care and tending of a commonality of shared concerns.[20]

Democracy is fugitive and sporadic, then. When it bursts onto the scene it extends old frontiers by drawing new groups, concerns, priorities, supports, or rights into them. Hence, democracy must not be governed too tightly by a prior set of moral principles, constitutional rules, corporate dictates, or normative codes. Democratic spontaneity encodes a measure of uncertainty and indeterminacy into the operative politics of the politi-

cal. Note, too, the barriers that must be overcome: often corporate power must be faced down; sometimes prior court decisions must be officially interpreted to be part of the Constitution; very often the established contours of electoral politics must be defined. Still another barrier is involved often enough, even though it is not emphasized by Wolin: in the instances of emancipation of African-Americans, labor unions, civil rights, women's rights, and the antiwar movement, what was previously taken to be an essential part of the common world by a majority or dominant portion of the people *had to be moved by creative and brave minorities until a new possibility became installed in the diversity of the common.*

That is, the weight of the common itself often poses barriers to the political extension of democracy. It is invoked to marginalize or liquidate challenges to the order. Those Wolin calls postmodernists often participate in such critical movements, working to redefine the common terms of discourse in one way or another. Sometimes they take aim at local authorities. At other times they address universities, corporations, the state, national and international churches, the interstate system, or some part thereof. Sometimes they mix into those efforts creative action aimed at modifying ordinary sensibilities in particular domains. To the extent Wolin acknowledges a constitutive tension between the politics of established commonality and the politics of becoming, by which the common is changed or pluralized, we are his allies. To the extent he tends to divest himself of this tension by pretending that we only address the politics of difference and becoming, we are his critics.

The ambiguity in the common suggests to me, then, an irreducible ambiguity in the political itself. Sometimes the resources of commonality can be drawn upon to expand the inclusiveness of the order; but sometimes elements in it must be resisted and moved by creative minorities defined initially to be narcissists, outcasts, or misfits by many ordinary people. Often enough, both tendencies come into play. The films *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* and *The Enemy of the People*, taken together, dramatize both possibilities in the common. That ambiguity, in turn, helps to explain why some of us refuse to treat constitutionalism simply as a barrier to democracy. The political now begins to look impure and essentially ambiguous, but no less important for all that. Its impurity and ambiguity may form part of the fugitive character Wolin so insightfully attaches to democracy.

When you reach the items on Wolin's final list of citizen movements, the positive force of the common shines through most vividly. These are things the order needs to sustain general inclusion and freedom. Still, when ordinary individuals from different walks of life band together for better schools, worker ownership, better health care, or safer water, what shape and texture do the relevant assemblages assume? Do diverse indi-

viduals and groups band together around a shared goal? Or is the political constellation itself often diverse in shape, motivation, intensity of commitment, and attachment to inspirational sources? Take better health care or support for ecologically sound practices. When successful, these causes are often supported by disparate constituencies whose different identities, faiths, straits, fears, interests, sensibilities, and hopes are drawn into an operational constellation too complex to be covered by a simplifying term. The complex assemblage in which they participate promotes a field of concerns irreducible either to the language of interest aggregation or that of commonality.

Does the periodic effervescence of democracy in a corporate, pluralistic, and pluralizing culture require first and foremost a shared sense of the common? Or negotiation of a generous ethos of engagement between diverse, interdependent constituencies who then strive to form the needed assemblages? Variations on those questions come up often in the essays in this book. As well they might. For when Wolin speaks of the "evanescence of the political" the phrase oscillates to and fro, depending on which term is accented. When he poses objections to "the nation" as either basis or goal of politics, the "*evanescence* of the political" comes to the fore. Now the political is forged from fugitive energies, rather than expressing a common aim already expressed by the people. This accent draws him close to some theorists he would call postmodern. But when he then contrasts the "evanescence of the *political*" to *his representation* of postmodernism he slides toward a more generic formulation of the common.[21] An admirable tension in his concerns may dictate that very oscillation, but a hesitancy to acknowledge it may encourage him to project one side of it onto others in order to push it away from himself. Perhaps, in some form or other, it is an ineliminable tension for democrats *because* the disparate elements critical to democracy stand in relations of both interdependence and tension. Wolin, for instance, fears that the proliferation of difference will overwhelm the possibility of democratic action in concert; but he also resists consolidation of the common into a unity tight enough to be a nation. The former threatens its preconditions; the latter, its evanescence.

Some of us, resisting Wolin's representation of our views, nonetheless learn from him that the fragility of democracy points in at least two directions. The absence of a cultural ethos of respect and inclusion across multiple differences also jeopardizes the politics of educational and economic inclusiveness. That means that historically formed commonalities sometimes function *both* to resist economic equalization and to curtail an appreciation of diversity. In response to this condition I pursue a generous ethos of engagement between multiple constituencies. Such an ethos provides the best chance to support the general conditions of educational, economic, ecological, and participatory inclusion and to respect a multidi-

mensional pluralism in which constituencies differ along the registers of religious faith, ethnicity, moral source, modes of sensual affiliation, and gender practice. It also allows politics to address more positively that recurrent tension between an existing pattern of pluralism and the politics of pluralization by which new constituencies emerge to modify the established terms of plurality. Since a positive ethos of plurality and the reduction of social and economic inequalities are both interdependent and valuable in themselves, the absence of either poses barriers to attainment of the other. But we also inhabit a world in which the interdependence between these two elements is tracked by a corollary tension between them. For to pursue one side relentlessly is often to give short shrift to the other. They coexist then as constitutive elements of democracy standing in a relation of interdependence and tension.

These are key issues of our time. Perhaps nobody has a lock on them. But Wolin, more than anyone else writing over the last fifty years, commands attention to them and thinks creatively about them. However often you turn these questions over, Wolin's appreciation of the indispensability and fugitive character of democracy enters into their disposition.

Democratic Variations

The authors of the essays in this volume profit from Wolin's corpus as they examine tensions within democracy, inside the political, between political economy and democratic politics, between the state and citizen actions that exceed it, and within the vocation of political theory. The essays in Part I focus closely on the tension between the protean character of democratic energies and the democratic need for institutional designs to project those renewals into the future. Nicholas Xenos, who was managing editor of the journal *democracy* from its creation by Wolin in 1981 to its demise several years later, concentrates on the tensions between the transgressive energies of democratic renewal and constitutional designs designed to protect them. Not only does Xenos himself argue that these are tensions to be negotiated rather than be resolved on the side of a "fugitive" politics of periodic renewal, he concludes that Wolin himself does not "maintain that democracy is without forms, since the conatus of the demos led it to occupy a variety of forms." George Kateb, however, sees things differently. He sees similarities between Wolin's emphasis on a demos of transgressive renewal and Michel Foucault's exploration of the "insurrection of subjugated knowledges." Fugitive democracy is the "authentically political moment" for Wolin, according to Kateb, and this leads Kateb to query Wolin on a "rage" for the "demotic" that may energize his work. The "urge to resist form" both teaches us something essential about democratic life and carries risks that need to be chastened. Fred Dallmayr and

Charles Taylor speak to these issues in a slightly different key. From the vantage point of Kateb's account, each may give too much privilege to the general over the particular and the common over the new. They draw sustenance from Wolin's early work in resetting the balance of his later essays. Fred Dallmayr puts valuable perspective on the tension between commonality and innovation by reviewing the efforts of Charles Lefort, Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Moufffe, Jacques Derrida, and Richard Rorty to engage that tension. He concludes that Wolin's focus on the "grassroots" character of democratic life carries the best hope to secure the needed balance. Taylor labors on the tension between the democratic imperative to have a strong collective identity to draw upon in responding to new dislocations and the exclusionary tendencies such an imperative can foster. Given the accelerating pace of immigration and other effects of globalization, "democratic societies are going to have to engage in a constant process of self-reinvention in the coming century," and these reinventions will speak to changes in both "common understandings" and the generation of new and "varied identities." While each of these essays defines the tensions and balances in somewhat different ways, they are all moved by Wolin's appreciation of the fugitive element in democracy.

The essays in Part II attend to the foregoing issues while locating them in the context of related issues that have found expression in Wolin's corpus. Wendy Brown, for instance, argues that the liberal practice of tolerance is condescending in its relation to difference and, more fundamentally, obscures the role of power in producing the very differences the practice of tolerance tends to essentialize. Concurring with Wolin's reading of Locke in *Politics and Vision*, Brown contends that a vibrant democratic politics would both reduce the scope of tolerance and amplify the cultural diversity that finds expression in democratic life. She looks to a politics that transcends toleration. Aryeh Botwinick explores a subterranean line of connection between Wolin's perspective and the politics of intimations pursued by Michael Oakeshott. According to Botwinick, "In assigning a role to tacit knowledge in their philosophies of political education, Oakeshott and Wolin also confirm their skepticism." Melissa Orlie engages the contemporary political economy of consumption in a way that makes close contact with Wolin's explorations of the tensions between capitalism and democracy. Drawing upon Foucault's "arts of the self," Orlie argues that consumption can become a set of practices through which we work on ourselves to foster freedom and foment democratic energies. The "imaginative practices of commodity consumption are signs of hope amid despair and alienated power precisely because they evince a persistent desire for freedom for power, even for democracy, in the otherwise politically hopeless conditions of political capitalism." Anne Norton explores the vexing question of the relation between death and democracy, extending that question into one about the relation be-

tween democracy and that which falls by the wayside in the political development of a culture. "The practice of democracy," she writes, "is the practice of loss." But these losses are not often recorded in triumphalist accounts of the democratic experience. These are the losses of temporality itself, which Wolin too explores.

Norton's essay could have begun Part III as effectively as it closes Part II, for the essays in this section focus on tradition, time, and space as they find expression in democratic politics and political theory today. Stephen White explores three ideas of the political in circulation today, drawing our attention to divergent orientations to commonality and difference that grow out of each tradition. He is particularly interested in assessing how each reading of an "ethos" of democracy speaks to the questions of commonality and difference. Kirstie McClure explores how professionalization of the history of political thought contributes to a loss of appreciation of the affective and demotic aspects of political writing, even as these latter forces operate in texts that have become canonical. By attending to these losses she seeks to reinvigorate elements in a forgotten "history that might have been." In a brilliant essay published in the Internet journal *Theory & Event* in 1998 under the title "What Time Is It?" Sheldon Wolin argued that political time is "out of joint" today.[22] It is so because the rapid pace of economy and the state is inconsonant with a politics of democratic action moving at a slower pace of deliberation and action. Michael Shapiro, while drawing sustenance from Wolin, contests one aspect of his temporal thesis. For Shapiro, these very dissonances can have positive as well as negative effects; they can help to open closed identities to self-reflection, to loosen the investment of democrats in a unified nation, and to encourage the formation of positive connections across multiple lines of difference.

It is fitting that this volume begins and ends with an essay by a former student of Wolin's. In the United States during the last fifty years, no one has surpassed Wolin as a consummate teacher who inspires former students by his example while encouraging them to chart their own intellectual course. Such an effect is abundantly discernible in the diverse pieces by Xenos, Brown, Botwinick, McClure, and Orlie in this volume. And it finds expression, as well, in the closing piece by Peter Euben. While attending to the thought of the teacher who so profoundly informs his work, Euben also revises Wolin's appreciation of democracy. Given the pace of life today, Euben argues, the democratic localism Wolin supports must be augmented by a cosmopolitan dimension through which citizens periodically act in combination with others outside their own states to rectify evils that particular states and interstate organizations would not or could not rectify alone. Euben draws upon Wolin to criticize four models of cosmopolitanism, even as he pulls the democratic imagination beyond the confines of the territorial state.

Notes

1. David Easton, *A Framework for Political Analysis* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, p. 22

2. See the summary of his perspective in Ilya Prigogine, *The End of Certainty: Time, Chaos and the New Laws of Nature* (New York: Free Press, 1996), p. 26. "Our own point of view is that the laws of physics, as formulated in the traditional way, describe an idealized, stable world that is quite different from the unstable, evolving world in which we live."

3. Isaiah Berlin, "Does Political Theory Still Exist?" in Henry Hardy, ed., *Concepts and Categories: Philosophical Essays of Isaiah Berlin* (Oxford: Penguin Books, 1979), p. 157.

4. Berlin, ibid., p. 162.

5. I note just a few examples: William E. Connolly, *Political Science and Ideology* (New York: Atherton Press, 1965); George Kateb, *Political Theory: Its Nature and Uses* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1968); and Charles McCoy and John Playford eds., *Apolitical Politics: A Critique of Behavioralism* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1967).

6. Berlin, "Does Political Theory Still Exist?" p. 169.

7. Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1960), p. 4.

8. Ibid., p. 11

9. Ibid., p. 10

10. Ibid., p. 18

11. Ibid., p. 358.

12. Ibid., pp. 430–31.

13. Ibid., p. 434.

14. Sheldon Wolin, "Political Theory as a Vocation," *American Political Science Review* (December 1969): 1064.

15. Ibid., p. 1068.

16. Ibid., pp. 1073–74.

17. Sheldon Wolin, "Fugitive Democracy," in Seyla Benhabib, ed., *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 31.

18. Ibid., p. 34.

19. Ibid., pp. 32, 35, 35.

20. Ibid., pp. 38, 38, 43, 43.

21. While I have been called a postmodernist by some, including one of my publishers and my friend Sheldon Wolin, it is not the term by which I designate my own thinking. Too many things I endorse get filtered out by the term. The term itself has become (what postmodernists call) a "floating signifier." In this case, its status remains negative so that its content can float with the concerns of the critic bestowing the name. It occupies, therefore, the cultural position traditionally reserved for the atheist in American public culture. Recall, for instance, how Tocqueville defined the latter through similar figures of restlessness, amoralism, and narcissism. In this context it may be pertinent to note why two restless thinkers from whom I draw selective sustenance both refused the title postmod-

ernist, even in its heyday. Michel Foucault did so because the theme of the world as text, advanced by some theorists self-described as postmodernists, did not sufficiently heed the significance of human corporeality or address the layered politics of normalization and resistance; and because his contestation of rational and transcendental derivations of morality was matched in his later work by an earthy ethic in which you cultivate presumptive care for diverse modes of being. Gilles Deleuze did so because he was deeply indebted to earlier philosophers such as Epicurus, Lucretius, Spinoza, Nietzsche, and Bergson, who could hardly be described as postmodern; because, rather than purporting to be postmetaphysical, he actively advanced a metaphysic that challenged mechanistic, rationalist, and finalist perspectives alike; and because he supported a positive politics of connections across diverse constituencies that renders his thought irreducible to the political options most commonly associated with postmodernism.

22. Sheldon Wolin, "What Time Is It?" *Theory & Event* 1, no. 1 (January 1997): http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory_&_event/toc/archive.html#1.1.