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## THE CITY IN THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY\*

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I need hardly remind this audience that one of the characteristics of our field is the large number of old and quite elemental questions—elemental but by no means elementary—for which we have no compelling answers. I don't mean that we have no answers to these questions. On the contrary, we often have a rich variety of conflicting answers. But no answer compels acceptance in the same way as a proof of a theorem in mathematics, or a very nice fit between a hypothesis and a satisfactory set of data.

Whether the obstacles that prevent us from achieving tight closure on solutions lie in ourselves—our approaches, methods, and theories—or are inherent in the problems is, paradoxically, one of these persistent and elemental questions for which we have a number of conflicting answers. For whatever it may be worth, my private hunch is that the main obstacles to closure are in the problems themselves—in their extraordinary complexity, the number and variety of variables, dimensions qualities, and relationships, and in the impediments to observation and data-gathering.

However that may be, a question of this sort often lies dormant for decades or even centuries, not because it has been solved but because it seems irrelevant. For even when no satisfactory theoretical answer exists to a very fundamental question, historical circumstances may allow it to be ignored for long periods of time. Even specialists may refuse to take a question seriously that history seems to have shoved into the attic. What seem like fundamental controversies in one age are very likely to be boring historical curiosities in the

next. And conversely it is my impression that a great many of the elemental political questions regarded as settled in one age have a way of surfacing later on.

### I

One question of this kind is the problem of the appropriate unit for a democratic political system. Some aspects of this problem are, at least to me, quite puzzling. For example, suppose we accept the guiding principle that the people should rule. We are immediately confronted by the question: what people? I don't mean which particular individuals among a collection of people, but rather: what constitutes an appropriate collection of people for purposes of self-rule? Among the vast number of theoretically possible ways of dividing up the inhabitants of this globe into more or less separate political systems, or, if you will, into "peoples," are there any principles that instruct us as to how one ought to bound some particular collection of people, in order that they may rule themselves? Why *this* collection? Why *these* boundaries?

Of course there are answers, like Schumpeter's statement that "a people" must define itself. But answers like these do not take us very far, or else they take us too far toward the simple doctrine that past might makes present right, and hence present might will make future right. A century ago in the United States a Civil War was fought to compel the Southern States by force of arms and military conquest to remain in the Union, a war, it is now painful to recall, that did not have as its official, ostensible, or ideological purpose the noble end of liberating Negroes and incorporating them into American life but, simply, the maintenance of the Federal Union, if necessary at the cost of the Negro. We can understand

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this easily enough as pure nationalism. But it is more difficult to see that the proclaimed goals of the North were much more than a particular and somewhat arbitrary definition of American nationhood. Do we then conclude that even if the development of a strong and uniform nationhood might be a condition for large-scale representative democracy, the manner and process by which a "people" defines itself—how it becomes a nation—cannot be judged or determined by any criteria derived from democratic theories or principles?

Just in case you may be about to dismiss all the questions I have just raised as irrelevant or uninteresting, let me be deliberately provocative by asking whether it could be wrong for the American South to have seceded in 1861 but right for South Vietnam to do so today. Alternatively, if military conquest of the Southern Confederacy by the North was justified, is military conquest of the South also justified by North Vietnam? If autonomous self-rule was right for Belgium in 1830 is it wrong for the Flemings today? If the independence of Canada from the United States is right, is the independence of Quebec from Canada also right? And if autonomy is right for France is it also right for the Celtic fringe in Brittany? Or in Britain?

I hope I have asked enough questions to persuade you that the problem of what particular and peculiar collections of people can be said to form a proper unit for self-government is relevant. And not only relevant: It is also perhaps just a bit disturbing, quite possibly even a frightening problem. Yet I do not think we are going to be permitted to ignore it in the near future.

Now that the problem of the appropriate unit for a democratic political system has been opened up, I want to skirt around the questions I have just raised in order to focus in the brief time available to me this evening on certain other aspects of the problem. I propose to ask what *kind* of unit is most appropriate for democratic government. Is there a unit within which the policies steadfastly supported by a majority of citizens should prevail against minorities within that unit and against all persons outside that unit? In fact, can we say that any specific unit is more appropriate for popular rule than any other?

Before I proceed, let me clarify what I mean by the kind of unit. Should democracy be based on a territorial unit, like a town, state, or country, or a non-territorial unit, like a labor union, business firm, or industry? How big should the unit be? Small, like a committee or neighborhood, large like a country or world

region, or something in between like a state, province or region? Or should it be any and all of these things?

Like the question of what constitutes a people, the question of what constitutes an appropriate unit is very widely regarded as settled. Yet a little reflection shows that it is actually a wide-open question. The approved school-solution is, of course, the nation-state. Yet the bare possibility that the question has not been so much answered by this solution as ignored is hinted at by the troubling recollection of a simple historical fact: accepting the nation-state as the appropriate unit for democracy required the flat negation of an older conventional view that prevailed for some two thousand years.

## II

The prior view, as I surely need not remind this audience, held that the appropriate unit for democracy is the city-state. The vision of democracy in the city-state that prevailed, by and large, from the Greeks to Rousseau is surely one of the most seductive ever generated in the Western world. Its millennial appeal draws its force, I think, from the vision of man living in a genuine human community of man-sized proportions. In this vision, the city-state must be small in area and in population. Its dimensions are to be human, not colossal, the dimensions not of an empire but of a town, so that when the youth becomes the man he knows his town, its inhabitants, its countryside about as well as any of us knows his own college or university. Given these human dimensions, at its best citizenship would be close to friendship, close even to a kind of extended family, where human relations are intense rather than bland, and where the eternal human quest for community and solidarity can be wholly satisfied within the visible and comprehensible limits of the *polis*. If the city-state is democratic—and it is this particular vision I have in mind—it would be small enough to insure extensive opportunities for direct participation by all free (male) citizens in the management of the community; and in the best of circumstances policies and decisions would reflect wide discussion and a pervasive consensus. Above all, the city-state would be autonomous, in the sense that no one who is not a citizen of that community would possess any legitimate right or power to interfere in the management of the affairs of the city.

I cannot think of any better description of this vision than Kitto's lovely account of an imaginary conversation between an Ancient

Greek and a present-day member of the Athenaeum Club in London:

The member regrets the lack of political sense shown by the Greeks. The Greek replies, "How many clubs are there in London?" The member, at a guess, says about five hundred. The Greek then says, "Now if all these combined, what splendid premises they would build. They could have a clubhouse as big as Hyde Park." "But," says the member, "that would no longer be a club." "Precisely," says the Greek, "and a polis as big as yours is no longer a polis."<sup>1</sup>

One cannot help wondering how much the geography of Greece helped to stimulate this vision, for that land of mountains, valleys, islands and the sea provided magnificent natural boundaries for each community and such a limited supply of arable land for each valley and island that it is only the barest poetic license to say that nature herself suggested the small, autonomous city state—and with this hint from nature a people to whom Prometheus himself had given the first elements of civilization were bound to elaborate among themselves the ideal form of the harsher and very often uglier reality they knew so intimately.

If the deficiencies of the vision seem obvious to the modern man who prefers the grandeur of the great nations and the glories of great metropolises like New York, London, Tokyo and Calcutta, it is worth recalling that the Greeks, too, understood that a price had to be paid for the small, autonomous city-state. If the city were to maintain its autonomy, and particularly if it were to be truly self-sufficient the price included a frugal and austere standard of daily life, pervasive violence and anarchy in inter-city relationships, and the need to defend one's city against all comers, including the giants. The Athenians, as we know, proved unwilling to accept the first and developed an empire; they suffered horribly from the second; and in the end they could not pay the last.

Nonetheless, for two thousand years thereafter the vision of democracy in the city-state dominated thought about democratic-republics. Today, that vision may be seen by a few people as a beguiling form of political life; but as a reality and as an ideal it is in no sense fundamental to modern political culture, it is known mainly to specialists, and almost no one seriously proposes that the modern democratic nations be carved up into genuinely auton-

omous city-states.

What happened is simply this: In the course of the nineteenth century, the nation-state displaced the city-state as the appropriate unit for democracy. The change, when it came, came swiftly. We can bracket the transition quite nicely by comparing Montesquieu and Rousseau, who still see the city-state as the only proper and indeed viable unit for a democratic republic, with John Stuart Mill, who in *Representative Government* dismisses as irrelevant in a single sentence at the end of a chapter, almost as an afterthought, the two-thousand year-old tradition. By Mill's time the nation-state had triumphed, the city-state was for all practical purposes an historical curiosity, and if democratic ideals were to survive they had to survive, it seemed, in the form of representative governments for nation-states and subordinate—but not autonomous—territorial units within nation-states.

In retrospect, the change seems simpler and more complete than it was. Nonetheless, it is almost as if Americans were to go away for a long week-end and come back on Monday morning believing that the Soviet Union represented free enterprise and bourgeois democracy.

We could zero-in even more precisely on this historic cross-roads by looking at the debate in our own Constitutional Convention of 1787, which was to create a constitution for the first of the giant representative democracies. By 1787, the population of the United States was already greater than that of all of Ancient Greece; in area it was immense, and everyone knew that its territory would go on growing. Yet the traditional view that a republic could flourish only in relatively small communities still persisted even among leading members of the Convention. In his famous argument in *Federalist No. 10*, which he originally advanced in the Convention itself, Madison met this prejudice head-on and in a brilliant exercise turned it upside down by arguing that faction, the inevitable and fatal disease of small republics, could be mitigated only in a republic of large size. Extend the bounds of a republic, the old tradition argued, and you destroy it. Narrow the bounds of a republic, Madison argued in rebuttal, and you make it vulnerable to the dread disease of all small republics—factionalism. Extend the bounds of a republic and you help to generate immunity to that disease.

As we all know, the institutional innovation that made it possible to extend the bounds of a republic was representation: an innovation that democrats like Madison, Jefferson, their French contemporary whose work Jefferson so

<sup>1</sup> H. D. F. Kitto, *The Greeks* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1951, 1957) p. 79.

much admired, Destutt de Tracy, and James Mill all regarded as one of the most profound political inventions of all time.

When the years of the American republic grew into decades, its mere existence stood as living proof that a democratic republic need not be as small as the city; thanks to representation it might indeed be gigantic. In the contest for supremacy in Europe the nation-state had long since come to prevail over the city-state; and as democratic ideas spread, they were focussed not on the obsolete and by now largely forgotten city-state but, naturally, on the nation-state. By the middle—and certainly by the end—of the nineteenth century the idea of democracy in the city-state had been entirely displaced by the idea of representative democracy in the nation-state. The triumph was complete.

Although it is often thought that the older view was refuted, it seems to me that it was not so much refuted as rejected. It is not clear, at least to me, that the kind of political life the Greeks thought possible in the small, autonomous, democratic city-state—even if these possibilities were not often fulfilled—is even theoretically possible with representative government in the large nation-state. Perhaps we create needless trouble for ourselves by claiming that the ideals and potentialities of democracy in the city-state are realized, or theoretically capable of being realized, through the institutions of representative government in the nation-state. One may question the value of the city-state ideal, and suspect the extent to which it was ever realized, for practise fell far short of the ideal even in Athens, and the seamy side of the city-state was, if one looks at it unromantically, pretty appalling. Yet however one may feel about these matters, the essential point is that representative government in the nation-state is in many respects so radically—and inescapably—different from democracy in the city-state that it is rather an intellectual handicap to apply the same term, democracy, to both systems, or to believe that in essence they are really the same.

### III

In any case it would surely be a sign of *hubris* to assert that the ideals and institutions of democracy have reached or will reach their final destination, and their fulfillment, in the nation-state. For one thing, with each passing day it grows more reasonable to see the nation-state as a transitory historic form, to foresee that the nation-state will some day cease to exist as an autonomous unit, just as the city-state did. I do not mean to rush things. The nation-state is a tough organism, with great

capacities for survival; it is still far and away the strongest and most durable political unit we know. In much of the world political leaders are even now struggling desperately to create their own nation-state out of the fragments of traditional societies; or, having achieved a momentary success, they go to bed each night half sick with worry lest they awake next morning and find their fragile nation has fallen into fragments during the night. In many parts of the world, it will be generations before peoples have defined themselves and have arrived at that state of confident nationhood where it finally becomes possible to imagine, without panic, the decline and supersession of the nation.

Those Western nation-states in which democracy has flourished for some generations are not only tough, but on the whole, I believe, extraordinarily benign units of government. Historically and comparatively, all the alternatives to representative government in the nation-state seem to me, and I imagine to most of us here, markedly inferior by comparison and often malignant, vicious, and anti-human. Nonetheless, straining to peer into the thick murk of the future, it is difficult, at least for me, to see mankind still existing on this globe without larger political orders than the nation-state, without greater displacement of international anarchy by constitutionalism and the rule of law. In the West, the nation-state has already lost some of its autonomy; it will lose more. Unless we political scientists are to be overswept by events, as we usually are; if we try, as Bertrand de Jouvenel keeps urging us, to conjecture about the future, in order to help shape it; if we use the past to help foresee the longer stretch ahead and not merely to dissect yesterday in order to understand a moment in the past and a moment today—then it is not too soon for us to anticipate a future for democracy when the major unit that has prevailed during the past two centuries, the nation-state, has become an integral and subordinate unit in some larger legal and constitutional order.

There is a second and more immediate reason why the nation-state is not an altogether satisfactory fulfillment of the ancient and continuing aspiration for democratic self-government: its immensity—immensity not so much of territory, which becomes less and less important, as immensity of numbers, of population, of citizens.

Unless wholly new evidence turns up, we shall never have anything more than the shakiest estimates of the population of Athens, but there are some reasonable if very rough guesses as to the approximate number of adult male citizens at about the time of Pericles—the

demos, then, in the Athenian democracy. A quorum in the Assembly was fixed for some purposes at 6,000. There were about 18,000 seats in the Pnyx, where the Assembly met. An estimate of 40,000 adult male citizens may be high; it is surely not too low.<sup>2</sup> And Athens, remember, was the largest of the ancient Greek city-states.

Consider, now, some present-day nation-states. The smallest democratic nation-state, Iceland, has more than twice as many adult citizens as Athens had by our outside estimate. What we ordinarily call small democracies are, in fact, gigantic. The number of adult citizens in New Zealand is around 30 times that of Athens, while the Netherlands has more than 100 times as many adult citizens as Athens had. France has more than 500 times as many, the United States about 2500, and India, the largest representative democracy in the world, five to six thousand times as many. In fact the number of new voters coming of age each year in India would supply a citizen body for more than a hundred city-states the size of Athens.

Fortunately for these giant systems, there are some important ways of participating in the political life of a democracy that are not significantly limited by the size of the citizen body or its territory. One of these, happily, is voting. Because different individuals can vote more or less simultaneously, and in different places, time and space do not limit the size of an electorate. Nor do time and space limit the number of citizens who can engage in various forms of consummatory and symbolic participation, such as reading about politics in the press, listening to the radio, or watching TV.

Some kinds of participation, on the other hand, cannot be performed simultaneously. Instead they have to be carried on sequentially. In these cases, time does impose restraints on size, and particularly on the number of individuals who can participate. For example, time's harsh and inescapable constraints impose severe limits on the size of a group that is intended for full and free discussion—a group, that is, in which every member has an opportunity to present his views to all the other members. I shall come back to these constraints in a moment.

<sup>2</sup> Various classical scholars have made valiant attempts to guess the population of Athens and its composition—citizens, adult males, metics, slaves—from the most fragmentary bits of evidence. I have not been able to locate any estimate that does not seem to leave great room for error. Kitto suggests "30,000 as a reasonable estimate of the normal number of citizens" in the Fifth Century: *op. cit.*, p. 131.

Returning to our question of the appropriate unit for democracy, and keeping in mind time's inexorable constraint, we discover that this simple and elemental limit on human behavior cuts both ways: Whenever the number of citizens grows large, to maximize their equal opportunities to control their government people must resort to representation. They have no alternative. Yet if time's constraint demands this shift from direct democracy to representative government, it also reduces and ultimately eliminates the possibility that every citizen can engage in a discussion that includes the officials who are charged with the authority to decide.

The greater the number of citizens, then, the longer and more indirect must be the channel of communication from the citizen to his top political leaders. But the communication between a citizen and his leaders is not a symmetrical relationship. Even in the Assembly at Athens, Pericles could speak directly and at great length to many more Athenians than could ever hope to speak directly to Pericles. But where the size of Pericles' audience was limited by the range of the unamplified human voice, radio and television have eliminated all constraints on the size of a speaker's audience. As a result, the larger a system grows, the more and more one-sided becomes communication between citizens and top leaders: the President of the United States can, in principle, speak directly to a hundred million potential voters, of whom only an infinitesimally small fraction can ever speak directly to him. If you doubt that the fraction is infinitesimally small, I urge you to try a few simple arithmetical exercises using the most generous calculations as to the President's time and the most severe restrictions on the length of the conversation between citizen and President.

There are, of course, ways of coping with this asymmetry in communications, but it would take me too far afield to explore them here. The essential point is that nothing can overcome the dismal fact that as the number of citizens increases the proportion who can participate *directly* in discussions with their top leaders must necessarily grow smaller and smaller. The inherent constraint is neither evil men nor evil institutions, nor any other eradicable aspect of human life, but rather a dimension of all existence that is morally neutral, because it is implacable, unswerving, and inescapable—time.

#### IV

I have a fantasy in which a modern Constitutional Convention assembles a group of 55

men or thereabouts whose commitment to democracy and whose wisdom are neither of them in doubt. Their task is to design democratic institutions suitable for this small planet in the year 2,000. And so they come to the problem of the unit.

Being learned, as well as wise, naturally they recall the city-state. Well, says one, since full civic participation is possible only if the number of citizens is small, let us arrange for a world of small democratic city-states. Let the unit of democracy, then, be the small city.

Ah, says another, you forget that the world of the 21st Century is not ancient Greece. You even forget that ancient Greece was the setting for a highly defective international system. The trouble with the small city in the modern world is that there are too many problems it cannot cope with, because they go beyond its boundaries. Think of some of the problems of American cities: revenues, transportation, air and water pollution, racial segregation, inequality, public health . . . I would make the list longer, but it is already long enough to show that the small city is obviously an inappropriate unit and that we have to locate democracy in a larger unit. I urge that we consider the metropolis.

But, says a third, even the boundaries of the metropolis are smaller than the kinds of problems you mention. The legal boundaries of the metropolis are an obsolete legacy of the past. What we need is metropolitan governments with legal boundaries extending to the limits of the metropolitan area itself, boundaries set not by obsolete patterns of settlement but by present densities.

Your argument is persuasive, says a fourth, but you do not carry it far enough. Demographers and planners now tell us that in the United States, to take one example, there is an uninterrupted urban area on the East Coast extending from Virginia to Maine. Even your metropolitan governments will be too small there. And in the future much of the world will surely be as densely settled as our Eastern seaboard. Consequently, I believe that we must design regional democracies, controlled by democratic governments responsive to the electorate of a whole region.

Well, says a fifth, I notice you have already bypassed such things as states and provinces, which is all to the good, since they are as anachronistic as the small city. But you will have to agree that even if you carve up the world into regional governments big enough, for instance, to cover the Eastern seaboard, you cannot expect these units to be adequate for

very long. With the population of the world reaching 6 billion, or 10 billion, most of the United States will soon be a vast, undifferentiated, urban mass. Other countries are headed in the same direction. There is, then, a good deal to be said for the only traditional unit that enjoys consensus and allegiance on a scale commensurate with the problems. I mean, of course, the nation-state. If we were to think of the United States as one city, as we shall have to do in the future, it is obvious that the proper unit to bound our sovereign electorate cannot be smaller than the United States. With minor changes here and there, the nation-state is probably good for another century or so. So let us proceed to make use of it by eliminating the powers of all the intermediate units, which are, after all, only obstacles that permit local groups to frustrate national majorities.

But, objects a sixth, you are still too much the victim of the past to think clearly about the future. Obviously our very existence depends on our capacity to create a government that will subordinate the nation-state to a larger legal order. Just as your villages, towns, cities, metropolises, and regions are too small to cope singlehandedly with their problems, so too is your nation-state, even one as big as the United States, the USSR, or China. The fatal flaw of the nation-state is its inability to eliminate interstate violence; and because of our genius for violence we can now destroy the species. Even prosaic problems are now beyond the control of the nation-state: the efficiencies that come from world markets, monetary problems, the balance of trade, the movement of labor and skills, air and water pollution, the regulation of fishing, the dissemination of nuclear weapons. . . . I know it is bold, but we must plan for a world government, and to us that surely means a democratic world government. The appropriate electorate for the 21st Century is nothing smaller than the human race. The only legitimate majority is the majority of mankind.

At this point there is a tumult of objections and applause. Finally the first speaker gains the floor. Each speaker, he says, has been more persuasive than the last. But, he adds, I simply cannot understand how my learned friend, the last speaker, proposes to govern the world, if he has in mind, as I thought, a single world-wide electorate, a single parliament, a single executive, all attempting to represent that non-existent monstrosity, a single world-wide majority. I say that even if it would miraculously hold together, which I doubt, a democracy

with six billion citizens is no democracy at all. I, for one, do not wish to be only one six-billionth part of any government. One may as well accept a despot and have done with the Big Lie that what we have is a democracy.

Ah, the advocate of a democratic world government now replies, of course I meant that there would be subordinate governments, which would be democracies.

I thank my learned colleague for this important clarification, says the advocate of the small city-state. I now propose that these subordinate governments consist of units about the size of small cities.

Again there is tumult. The speaker who now gains the floor is the one who had earlier spoken in behalf of the metropolis. Hold on, he objects, if we are to have a subordinate unit, surely it must be one large enough to deal with the problems of an urban society. Obviously this unit should be the metropolis. . . .

Suddenly it becomes as clear to everyone at the Constitutional Convention as it has become to you that the argument over the unit has gone completely around in a circle, that it has now started all over again, that it has no logical terminus, that it could go on forever. Perhaps that is why we still talk about the city-state.

For the logic seems unassailable. Any unit you choose smaller than the globe itself—and that exception may be temporary—can be shown to be smaller than the boundaries of an urgent problem generated by activities of some people who are outside the particular unit and hence beyond its authority. Rational control over such problems dictates ever larger units, and democratic control implies a larger electorate, a larger majority. Yet the larger the unit, the greater the costs of uniform rules, the larger the minorities who cannot prevail, and the more watered down is the control of the individual citizen. Hence the argument for larger units does not destroy the case for small units. What it does is to make a seemingly small but radical shift in the nature of the arguments.

For we drop completely the notion so dear to the Greeks and early Romans that to be legitimate a unit of government must be wholly autonomous. With autonomy we also drop the belief that there is a single sovereign unit for democracy, a unit in which majorities are autonomous with respect to all persons outside the unit and authoritative with respect to all persons inside the unit. Instead we begin to think about appropriate units of democracy as an ascending series, a set of Chinese boxes, each larger and more inclusive than the other,

each in some sense democratic, though not always in quite the same sense, and each not inherently less nor inherently more legitimate than the other.

Although this may be a discomfiting and alien conception in some democratic countries where political tradition has focussed on the over-riding legitimacy, autonomy, and sovereignty of the nation-state and of national majorities, even in these countries the evolution of pluralistic institutions has vastly modified the applicability of monistic conceptions of democracy. And of course in democracies with federal systems, like Switzerland, Canada, and the United States, or in non-federal countries like the Netherlands that inherit a political tradition powerfully shaped by federalism and the legitimacy of pluralist institutions, to see the units of democracy as a set of Chinese boxes is very much easier—though even in these countries it will take some re-thinking and a vast amount of institution-building before any of us can think easily about the nation-state as a Chinese box nested in yet larger ones of equal legitimacy.

Our imaginary Constitutional Convention, and our Chinese boxes do not, of course, bring us much closer to a solution to our original problem of the appropriate unit for democracy. But they do suggest that there is not necessarily a single kind of unit, whether it be city-state or nation-state, in which majorities have some specially sacred quality not granted to majorities in other units, whether smaller or larger, more or less inclusive.

A Frenchman, perhaps even an Englishman, or any strong believer in majority rule will tell me that surely in one of these boxes there must be a majority that is sovereign, or else conflicts between different majorities, one of which may in a larger perspective be only a minority, can never be resolved. I ask, very well, a majority of what unit? And my critic will say, the majority, naturally, of the nation. To which I reply, *why* is this more sacred than the others? Because it is larger? But I can point to still larger majorities in the making in this world. Will you remain faithful to your answer when your nation is a unit in a world polity? Or will you not, instead, revert to federalist conceptions? Anyway, I might add, in a number of federal countries, including some rather old and respectable representative democracies, citizens have grown moderately accustomed to the idea that national majorities—or rather their spokesmen—are not necessarily more sacred than majorities or minorities in certain kinds of less inclusive units. This is logically

untidily, and it requires endless readjustments as perspectives and levels of interdependence change. But it makes for a better fit with the inevitable pluralistic and decentralizing forces of political life in nation-states with representative governments.

The hitherto unreported debate at our imaginary Convention also suggests that in a world of high population densities, ease of communication, and great interdependence, where autonomy is in fact impossible short of the earth itself, we confront a kind of dilemma that the Greeks could hardly have perceived. Let me suggest it by advancing a series of propositions:

The larger and more inclusive a unit, the more its government can regulate aspects of the environment that its citizens want to regulate, from air and water pollution and racial justice to the dissemination of nuclear weapons.

Yet, the larger and more inclusive a unit with a representative government, and the more complex its tasks, the more participation must be reduced for most people to the single act of voting in an election.

Conversely, the smaller the unit, the greater the opportunity for citizens to participate in the decisions of their government, yet the less of the environment they can control.

Thus for most citizens, participation in very large units becomes minimal and in very small units it becomes trivial. At the extremes, citizens may participate in a vast range of complex and crucial decisions by the single act of casting a ballot; or else they have almost unlimited opportunities to participate in decisions over matters of no importance. At the one extreme, then, the people vote but they do not rule; at the other, they rule—but they have nothing to rule over.

These are extreme cases, and if they were all there were, it would be a discouraging prospect. But may there not be others in between?

Before we turn to this question, I want you to notice that our hypothetical Constitutional Convention and the Chinese boxes also hint at the possibility that we may need different models of democracy for different kinds of units. By models I mean here both empirical models that would help us to understand the world as it *is* and normative models that would guide us in shaping the world we believe *ought* to be. We need models that approximate reality in the world of history and experience, and models that indicate standards of performance by which we can appraise the achievements of a particular democracy. I see no reason to think that all kinds of units with democratic institutions and practices do,

can, or should behave in the same way—no reason, then, why we should expect democracy in a committee, in a city, and in a nation to be markedly different both in fact and in ideal. If we expect that representative government in the nation-state is roughly equivalent to democratic participation in a committee then we are bound to be misled in our understanding of political life, in our hopes, and in our strategies for changing the world from what it is to what it ought to be.

## V

Let me rephrase my question. If the nation-state is too immense, and if interdependence and population densities render the autonomous self-governing city-state too costly, are there units powerful enough, autonomous enough, and small enough to permit, and in the right circumstances to encourage, a body of citizens to participate actively and rationally in shaping and forming vital aspects of their lives in common? Is there, in this sense, an optimal unit?

There are a number of candidates for this position. Occasionally, for example, one still runs across a nostalgia for the village—a nostalgia strongest, I suspect, among people who have never lived in small towns. There are also suggestions going back nearly a century that we shift our search for the democratic unit away from the government of the state to the government of non-state institutions, such as the workplace, business firm, corporation, or industry. And lately there has been a resurgence of interest, especially among young political activists, in the old and recurring idea of reconstructing democracy around small units that would offer unlimited opportunities for participation.

Although I cannot possibly do justice to these various alternatives in the brief time available to me here, I would like to venture a few comments on each.

The fragmented and even shattered community in which modern man seems condemned to live tempts one to suppose that the appropriate unit for democratic life might be the village or small town. Only there, it might be thought, could one ever hope to find a center of life small enough so that it permits wide participation, and small enough besides to foster the sense of unity, wholeness, belonging, of membership in an inclusive and solidary community which we sometimes seem to want with such a desperate yearning. Speaking for myself, I doubt whether man can ever recapture his full sense of tribal solidarity. Like childhood itself, there is no returning to the childhood of man. What is more, the attempt

to satisfy this craving, if carried far on a densely packed globe, leads not to community but to those hideously destructive forms of tribalism that this century has already seen too much of.

Anyway, I suspect that the village probably never was all that it is cracked up to be. The village, including the pre-industrial village, is less likely to be filled with harmony and solidarity than with the oppressive weight of repressed deviation and dissent which, when they appear, erupt explosively and leave a lasting burden of antagonism and hatred. I have not been able to discover much evidence of the consensual *gemeinschaft* in descriptions of the small town of Springdale in upstate New York, or St. Denis in Quebec, or Peyrane, the village in the Vaucluse, or the small English town of Glossop near Manchester, or the peasant village of Montegrano in South Italy, or the Tanjore village in South India that André Betéille recently described.<sup>3</sup>

Here, for example, is how Horace Miner saw political life in the French Canadian parish of St. Denis thirty years ago:

Politics is a topic of continual interest and one which reaches fever heat during election time . . . The whole parish is always divided between the "blues" or Conservatives, and the "reds." Party affiliations follow family lines and family cliques and antagonisms. The long winter *veillées* are attended almost invariably by family groups of similar political belief. Constituents of each party have a genuine dislike for those of the other . . . Election time is one of great tension, of taunts and shouting as parishioners get their evening mail . . . Insults are common, and many speaking acquaintances are dropped. During the last election the minority candidate had to have one meeting in the parish in secret, another open but under provincial police protection . . . Campaigns reach their climax with the *assemblée contradictoire*, at which both candidates speak. Characteristically at these meetings there are organized strong-arm tactics, drinking, and attempts to make each candidate's speech inaudible . . .

<sup>3</sup> Arthur J. Vidich and Joseph Bensman, *Small Town in Mass Society* (Garden City, N. Y.: Anchor Books, 1960); Horace Miner, *St. Denis, A French Canadian Parish* (Chicago: University of Chicago Phoenix Books, 1939, 1963); Laurence Wylie, *Village in the Vaucluse* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1957, 1964); A.H. Birch, *Small-Town Politics, A Study of Political Life in Glossop* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959); Edward C. Banfield, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (New York: The Free Press, 1958); André Betéille, *Caste, Class and Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966).

The chicanery of politicians is a byword in the parish. Factional strife threatens the life of every organized association . . . On the whole the associational life of the community is weak. The people are not joiners.<sup>4</sup>

Thus the village democracy before the demos was ruined by industrialization and urbanization!

If the democratic village seems hardly worth seeking in this industrial and post-industrial epoch, the prospect is all the more appealing that democracy might be extended to the place where most adult citizens spend most of their time—their place of work. Professional people with a great deal of autonomy, academics like ourselves who enjoy an extraordinary amount of autonomy and a fair measure of self government in our universities, executives and administrators who see authority relationships from above rather than from below, all are likely to underestimate the consequences for the average citizen in a modern industrial society flowing from the fact that at his place of work he is a rather low-level subordinate in a system of hierarchical relationships. Although the term democracy has been prostituted in the service of employee relationships, the fact is that practically everywhere in the world, the industrial workplace—the factory, industry, or corporation, whether owned privately or publicly—is no democracy in any sense consistent with our usage in the realm of the state. "The idea of a factory, nationalized or privately-owned," it has been said, "is the idea of command."<sup>5</sup> The factory, the enterprise, the industry, the corporation is a hierarchy; it may be an aristocracy, an oligarchy, a monarchy, a despotism, but it is not a democracy. This is as true in socialist economies as in capitalist and mixed economies. A century ago Engels asserted that hierarchy would be necessary in the factory even under socialism, that even in a socialist enterprise the worker would lose his autonomy. Over the entrance to the factory, he said, recalling *The Inferno*, the words should be written:

*Lasciate ogni autonomia, voi che entrate!*<sup>6</sup>

Whether the work-place should be democratized, and if so how and how much, are questions that need to be distinguished from the

<sup>4</sup> Miner, *op. cit.*, 58–61.

<sup>5</sup> Graham Wooton, *Workers, Unions and the State* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), 36.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36. The quotation is from Engels' essay "On Authority" in Lewis S. Feuer (ed.), *Marx and Engels: Basic Writings* (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1959), 481–484.

problem of regulating the enterprise, industry, or corporation to insure that it accomplishes the social and public functions that are the only reason the rest of us are willing to grant its vast legal rights, privileges and immunities, and extraordinary power. If democratic states have become immense, so have corporations. There are privately owned corporations that have gross annual revenues greater than the GNP of most countries of the world, that spend annually sums greater than the entire budgets of the governments of most of the nation-states in the world. To insure that these immense resources and powers are used for public purposes is a staggering problem. But internal democracy in the factory, firm, industry or corporation is not necessarily a more effective means of public control than regulating a hierarchically administered firm by competition and the price system, by a regulatory agency, by government ownership, or by various combinations of these and other possibilities. Indeed, even if the modern corporation were internally democratic, no matter whether it were public or private and no matter whether it were to operate in an economy predominantly privately owned or predominantly publicly owned, I do not think we any more than the Soviets or Yugoslavs would want to dispense entirely with such external controls as competition and the price system. In short, no system of *internal* control negates the need for a system of *external* controls that compel or induce those who exercise authority within the enterprise, whether these managers are chosen by and are accountable to stockholders, workers, or the state, to employ their power and resources for jointly beneficial purposes rather than for exploiting consumers.

But even if we can distinguish the problem of internal democracy from that of external control, the problem does not vanish. And even if this problem is extraordinarily difficult—as I think it is—it seems to me too important to be neglected, particularly by political scientists. It is true that in many developed countries with representative governments, trade union power has substituted bargaining for undiluted hierarchy in the control of wages and working conditions. But even where they are most powerful, labor unions have by no means created a democratic factory or industry; moreover, as a result more of apathy than of repression, few unions anywhere have developed a really high degree of internal democracy. Aside from a few scattered instances elsewhere,<sup>7</sup> the most mas-

sive, ambitious, and far-reaching experiment in democratizing the workplace has been taking place in Yugoslavia since 1950. Sober studies<sup>8</sup> suggest that while the system of workers' control has problems—some of them, like apathy and Michel's iron law of oligarchy, familiar to every student of democratic organizations—it might well prove to be a viable system of internal control. If it does, it will surely stand as an alternative with a very great appeal—at least in the long run—to workers in other industrial nations. If workers can participate in the government of their factories in Yugoslavia, and if these factories prove to be relatively efficient, surely the whole question of internal democracy will come alive in other countries.

Yet even if it should prove to be possible, efficient, and desirable, I do not believe that democracy in the work-place is a substitute for democracy in the state. For one thing, I doubt whether democracy in the work place can be preserved indefinitely unless there is democracy in the state. Moreover, where an opposition party is illegal in the state, opposition in the factory has distinct limits.<sup>9</sup> Finally—and this is the most important point—the work place is not as important as the state and with increasing leisure it may grow less so. To accept as a focus for self-government a type of unit that is and must be concerned with only a small part of the range of collective concerns would be to trivialize the democratic idea. I find it hard to believe that man's aspiration toward rational control over his environment by joint action with his fellow men will ever be satisfied by democratizing the production of aspirin, cars, and television sets.

As I have already suggested, any form of political participation that cannot be performed more or less simultaneously but must be carried on sequentially runs into the implacable barrier of time. Time's relentless arrow flies directly to the Achilles' heel of all schemes for participatory democracy on a grand scale. It is easy to show that any unit small enough for all the members to participate fully (where each member has the opportunity to present his views and have them discussed) cannot be larger than a working committee. If you doubt

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Albert Meister, *Socialisme et Autogestion, L'Expérience Yougoslave* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1964); and Jiri Kolaja, *Workers Councils: The Yugoslav Experience* (New York and Washington: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966).

<sup>9</sup> See the comments of Kolaja, *op. cit.*, pp. 7 and 66f.; and Meister, *op. cit.*, pp. 240–245, 263–278, 373.

<sup>7</sup> Wooton, *op. cit.*, 113–124.

this, I ask you to sit down with pencil and paper and do a few exercises with various assumptions as to the time available for decisions and the time required for each participant to make his point or at least present his point of view.<sup>10</sup> You will quickly see how cruel is time's neutral guillotine. Or let me simply evoke your own experience with committees to remind you how quickly a committee grows too large for every member to participate fully. Or consider the experience of legislative committees, cabinets, regulatory commissions, judicial bodies.

Would we not all agree that an effective working committee can have no more than—let us err on the side of generosity—30 to 40 members? Drawing on your own experience, most of you, I imagine, would cut these figures by a half or two-thirds.

Now if the great advantage of a unit the size of a working committee is that it allows full participation by its members, its great drawback, from a democratic point of view, is that unless it is a representative body or an agent of a representative body it ought not be given much public authority. Either the unit, though small, is granted authority because it represents a much larger number of citizens; or else, not being a representative body, it has little authority other than to recommend and advise; or else, if it has much power and is not a representative body, its power is illegitimate. In an interdependent society, any significant power wielded by a body the size of a working committee is bound to have important effects on citizens not sitting on that committee. Consequently either the committee is representative or its power is illegitimate. We can hardly espouse the small, self-governing, fully participatory unit as a normative goal if it is illegitimate. If it is representative, then it is no longer a body in which all citizens can participate fully. We have run into a *cul de sac*, as you see, and so we must get back to the starting point.

Some of you may regard this as a pessimistic analysis. It is, I admit, a very large fly in the ointment. Like death, it may be a brutal and perhaps even a tragic limit on man's possibilities, but I do not see why this conclusion must lead to pessimism. The idea of democracy would never have gotten off the ground if enthusiastic democrats had not been willing to settle for something a good deal less than complete and equal participation by all citizens in all decisions. It is worth recalling

that in Athens, where the opportunities for free male citizens to participate in running the city seem to have been about as great as they have ever been anywhere, citizens were chosen for what was probably the most coveted participation in the life of the polis—a seat on the Council of Five Hundred, the inner council, or the various administrative boards—by lot or, in the case of the Board of Generals, by election, and to that extent these bodies were instances of representative government and not direct democracy. Participation in the Assembly, which met about once a month, was scarcely the fullest flowering of participatory democracy. I have been to enough town meetings myself to know something of their limitations. If you think of a town meeting in which a quorum sometimes required the presence of 6,000 people, where maybe as many as 30–40,000 were eligible to attend, and where perhaps 4–5,000 were frequently present, it is obvious that most Athenian citizens must have lived their lives without once speaking to their fellow citizens in the Assembly. That, one judges from the reports in Thucydides, was a forum that gave preference to orators.

Nonetheless, I doubt—although we shall never know—whether many Athenians felt frustrated because their opportunities to participate were not as unlimited as their skies. Between the working committee and the nation-state there is, I think, a critical threshold of size, below which the opportunities for participation can be so great and so fairly meted out that no one feels left out and everyone feels that his viewpoint has been pretty fairly attended to. Athens was far too large for the democracy of the working committee; *de facto* it had to employ a certain amount of representation. Yet I suspect that it was below the critical threshold. And even if we now reject as unattainable the ideal of full, equal, and direct participation by all citizens in all collective decisions—the ideal of committee democracy—we can still search for a unit that remains within this critical threshold for widespread participation.

## VI

We have travelled a long trail and turned into a number of branching paths in our quest but we have not found a unit that seems optimal for rational self-government. The journey would have been much longer had we taken the time to explore the by-ways as carefully as they deserve. Yet if we keep going, I think that we shall finally end up about at the place

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Bertrand de Jouvenel, "The Chairman's Problem," this REVIEW, 55 (June, 1961), 368–372.

where the Greeks left off: somewhere within view of the democratic city.

Yet what we come to is not the Greek city, nor can it be; not the *polis*, then, but a democratic city that would be consistent with the presence of the nation-state, the institutions of representative government, a level of technology beyond anything the Greeks dreamed of, and huge populations densely spread over the face of our shrunken earth.

If ancient Greeks were the first truly modern people, choice shaped by geography and historical accident made them also city people. So, too, choice shaped by demography and technology makes us a city people. But even if the Greeks were a city people and though they were modern in almost every important sense, our cities must differ in fact and in ideal from their actual and ideal cities. For one thing, the proportion of the residents of a modern democratic city eligible to participate in political life will be very much larger—something like half of the population, so that even a city of 100,000 will have around 50,000 adult citizens. Much more quickly than the Greeks, we reach the limits of direct democracy. Moreover, the citizens of a modern city will also be highly mobile. A resident of Athens was a citizen only if his ancestors were Athenians; in any modern city, many citizens are recent arrivals, or are about to move to another city. In 1960 more than one resident out of every six in American cities had moved there within the last five years.<sup>11</sup> As a result of our mobility, socialization into the political life of the modern democratic city is enormously more difficult for us than for the Greeks. Then, too, the Greek city was completely autonomous in ideal and pretty much so in fact. Our cities are not autonomous in fact nor would many of us offer total autonomy as an ideal. Finally, the citizen of a Greek city ordinarily had one inclusive loyalty to the city of his ancestors and to its gods. He invested in his city a kind of engagement in comparison with which patriotism in the nation-state must seem either shallow or strident. But the citizens of our modern cities will have no single loyalty and no single community; they will have multiple

loyalties to many associations; and nowhere will they find the all-inclusive community.

If for these reasons a modern city cannot be a *polis*, we can nonetheless reasonably hope one day to achieve great democratic cities. As the optimum unit for democracy in the 21st Century, the city has a greater claim, I think, than any other alternative.

To begin with, from now on into the next century man seems clearly destined to live in cities. If to live in cities is our fate, to live in great cities is our opportunity. Is it not of some significance that of the four great waves of experimentation in the West with popular government, during three of these—the Greek, the Roman, and the medieval communes of North Italy—popular governments managed to construct cities of exceptional and enduring beauty?

Yet during the fourth wave, that of representative democracy in the nation-state, we have so far failed most profoundly in our cities. Is it too much to hope that we might be on the verge of a fifth wave, the age of the democratic city within the democratic nation-state? By we, I mean of course, the whole of the Western democratic world and its off-shoots. But most of all, I mean we here in the United States.

City-building is one of the most obvious incapacities of Americans. We Americans have become an urban people without having developed an urban civilization. Though we live in cities, we do not know how to build cities. Perhaps because we have emerged so swiftly out of an agrarian society, perhaps because so many of us are only a generation or two removed from farm and field, small town and peasant village, we seem to lack the innate grasp of the essential elements of the good city that was all but instinct among Greeks, Romans, and the Italians of the free communes. Our cities are not merely non-cities, they are anti-cities—mean, ugly, gross, banal, inconvenient, hazardous, formless, incoherent, unfit for human living, deserts from which a family flees to the greener hinterlands as soon as job and income permit, yet deserts growing so rapidly outward that the open green space to which the family escapes soon shrinks to an oasis and then it too turns to a desert.

One advantage of the city as a unit for democratic government is, then, that it confronts us with a task worthy of our best efforts because of its urgency, its importance, its challenge, the extent of our failure up to now, and its promise for the good life lived jointly with fellow citizens.

These considerations point to another asset of the city as a democratic unit. While the

<sup>11</sup> In 1960 the percentage of migrants from another country since 1955 for all U.S. cities 25,000 and over was 18.4%. The percentages ran slightly higher (19.7%) in small cities of 25–50,000 than in cities over 150,000 (15.6%). See Jeffrey K. Hadden and Edgar F. Borgatta, *American Cities, Their Social Characteristics* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1965), Appendix, Table 1, variable #19, p. 108.

city is not and cannot be autonomous, the policies of city hall and the totality of city agencies and activities are so important to our lives that to participate in the decisions of the city means, or anyway can mean, participating in shaping not merely the trivial but some of the most vital aspects of our environment. I say shaping and not totally controlling because the city is only one of our Chinese boxes. But it is in the city and with the powers and resources made available to cities that we shall deal with such crucial problems as the education of our children, our housing, the way we travel to and from our place of work, preventive health measures, crime, public order, the cycle of poverty, racial justice and equality—not to mention all those subtle and little understood elements that contribute so heavily to the satisfaction of our desires for friendship, neighborhood, community, and beauty.

Yet if the city and its government are important to us, can the good city today be small enough to remain below that critical threshold for wide participation that I mentioned a moment ago? I do not know any question more important to us as political scientists, nor any that we have so completely ignored. From evidence and analysis that are both all too incomplete, I should like to hazard an answer.

The existence of a few giant metropolises here and there may mislead us as to fact and possibility. Only a modest percentage of the world's population lives even today in the giant metropolis. Indeed, in 1960 only one-fifth of the people of the world lived in cities over 100,000. It is true that in the most urbanized region of the world, North America, in 1960 six out of every ten people lived in cities over 100,000. Yet even in the United States, less than one out of every ten lived in cities over a million.

It will take some doing, but we do not have to end up all jammed together in the asphalt desert of the large metropolis—unless that is really what we want. And Americans pretty clearly do not want to live in the large metropolis but rather in cities of modest dimensions. For example, in a survey by Gallup last year nearly half the respondents living in cities of 500,000 and over said they would like to live somewhere else—suburb, small town, farm; by contrast, few of the people living in suburb or town wanted to move to the big cities. About three out of four respondents are distressed by the prospect that their own community will double in population.<sup>12</sup> Census

figures for the past several decades tell us that Americans have been acting out these preferences.

What, then, is the optimum size for a city? Curiously, this question, which so far as I know was first asked by political philosophers in Athens over 2,000 years ago, is no longer a subject of discussion among political scientists. I do not know why this should be so, but I wonder if it is because we have come to take a purely passive and defeatist view: the size of a city, we say, is beyond control, so the best we can do is to adapt political institutions to the facts. I am reminded of Rousseau's comment on Grotius, that his invariable mode of reasoning was always to establish right from fact. One might employ a more logical method, Rousseau remarked, but not one more favorable to tyrants.

If to our own loss we have ignored the question of the optimum size of cities, fortunately it has been examined by scholars in a variety of fields other than our own. It is impossible to do justice to this discussion here but the analysis and the evidence are too important for us to ignore.<sup>13</sup> It is only fair to warn you that this is a controversial area, yet the evidence seems to me to support the conclusion that the all-round optimum size for a contemporary American city is probably somewhere between 50,000 and 200,000, which, even taking the larger figure, may be within the threshold for wide civic participation.

There is, for example, no worthwhile evidence that there are any significant economies

<sup>13</sup> The most extensive survey and analysis of the evidence seems to be the work of Otis Dudley Duncan. The findings of his Ph.D. dissertation, *An Examination of the Problem of Optimum City-Size* (University of Chicago, 1949) have been summarized in Otis Dudley Duncan, "Optimum Size of Cities" in Paul Hatt and Albert Reiss (eds.), *Reader in Urban Sociology* (Glencoe, Ill: Free Press, 1951), 632-645; and James Dahir, "What is the Best Size for a City?," *American City* (August, 1951), 104-105. Robert A. Lillibridge, "Urban Size: An Assessment," *Land Economics*, 38 (Nov., 1952), 341-352, summarizes Duncan and others. In addition, see William Fielding Ogburn and Otis Dudley Duncan, "City Size as a Sociological Variable," in Ernest W. Burgess and Donald J. Bogue, eds., *Urban Sociology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, Phoenix Books) 58-76; Otis Dudley Duncan, "Optimum Size of Cities" in Joseph J. Spengler and Otis Dudley Duncan (eds.), *Demographic Analysis* (Glencoe, The Free Press, 1956), 372-385.

<sup>12</sup> American Institute of Public Opinion release, April 24, 1966.

of scale in city governments for cities over about 50,000. The few items on which increasing size does lead to decreasing unit costs, such as water and sewerage, are too small a proportion of total city outlays to lead to significant economies; and even these reductions are probably offset by rising costs for other services, such as police protection.<sup>14</sup>

Per capita city expenditures increase with the size of city, at least in the United States. In 1960 the mean expenditure for U.S. cities over 150,000 was \$123 per capita compared with \$70 per capita for cities in the 25-50 thousand range. Yet there is no evidence that these higher costs per capita provide residents of large cities with a better life, taking it in the round, than the life enjoyed by residents of smaller cities. If it costs more in a city of a million than in a city of 25,000 to build, maintain, and police a park within walking distance of every citizen, then higher per capita expenditures for parks in big cities hardly signify that their residents have better public services than residents of smaller cities. What is more, the outlays in larger cities are actually less for some key functions than in smaller cities. For example, even though larger cities employ more persons per capita in public administration than smaller cities, per capita employment in education is on the average lower in larger cities than in small cities.<sup>15</sup>

Roads and highways nullify the older economic advantage of the metropolis as a market and a source of specialized labor. A student of urban economics argues, for example, that

<sup>14</sup> I am indebted to Mr. Garry D. Brewer for undertaking an extensive survey of the writings and findings dealing with economies of scale in American cities. The relevant literature is extensive, but the most relevant studies appear to be Amos H. Hawley's seminal article, "Metropolitan Population and Municipal Government Expenditures in Central Cities," *Journal of Social Issues*, 7, nos. 1 and 2 (1951), 100-108; Werner Z. Hirsch, "Expenditures Implications of Metropolitan Growth and Consolidation," *Review of Economics and Statistics*, 41 (August, 1959) 232-241; Harvey E. Brazer, *City Expenditures in the United States*, National Bureau of Economic Research Occasional Paper no. 66 (New York, 1959). See also the analysis of the evidence of these studies in Wilbur R. Thompson, *A Preface to Urban Economics* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1965), Ch. 7, "The Urban Public Economy," 255-292.

<sup>15</sup> Data in the paragraph above are from Hadden and Borgatta, *op. cit.*, Appendix, Table 1, p. 110, variables 57, 58, and 65.

A half-dozen towns of, say, 25,000 population with two or three main industries each plus a dozen small one- or two-industry towns of half that size add up to a 300,000 population, extended local labor market, built on the moderately broad base of a couple of dozen separate industries.<sup>16</sup>

The oft-cited cultural advantages of metropolises are also largely illusory. On the basis of his research on American cities, Duncan estimates that the requisite population base for a library of "desirable minimum professional standards" 50,000-75,000, for an art museum, 100,000, "with a somewhat higher figure for science and historical museums." Yet, even though larger cities have larger libraries, the circulation of library books per capita markedly decreases with size of city. There is also a negative correlation between city size and per capita museum attendance.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, just as smaller cities can retain their collective identities and yet form a larger economic unit, thanks to ease of transportation and communication, so we have barely begun to explore the ways in which small cities by federating together for specific purposes might enjoy all of the cultural advantages of the large city and yet retain their individual identities, the pleasures of living in communities of lower densities and more open spaces,<sup>18</sup> and relatively greater opportunities for political participation.

When we think about the size of a city in which a high culture may flourish, it is instructive to recall that Rome in the Augustan age probably had a population of about 350,000. During the Renaissance the city that produced Machiavelli and, I think it fair to say, an outpouring of great paintings, sculpture, and architecture beyond anything we Americans have yet created, had a population of around a hundred thousand. This was probably about the population of the city of Venice during the Renaissance, and of Rome when Michaelangelo chiselled out his Moses and painted his frescoes in the Sistine Chapel.

<sup>16</sup> Thompson, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

<sup>17</sup> Duncan, "Optimum Size of Cities," *op. cit.* p. 381.

<sup>18</sup> ". . . museums, professional athletic teams, complete medical facilities, and other accoutrements of modern urban life could be supported collectively. As the federated places grew and prospered the interstices would, of course, begin to fill in, moving the area closer to the large metropolitan area form. But alert action in land planning and zoning could preserve open spaces in a pattern superior to those found in most large urban areas." Thompson, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

Now what is strangely missing from the discussion of the optimum size of cities is the voice of the political scientist. The question is, of course, broader than the problem of what size of city may be optimal for a democratic political life. But political life is not trivial. Surely political criteria have a place among the criteria for the optimum size of cities; and among these political criteria surely one of the most important is whether a city is beyond the threshold for widespread participation. The whole question needs more study than it has had. But it looks to me as if the all-round optimum size for a city—the range, say, from 50 thousand to about 200 thousand—is below this threshold. If this is so, then there is no other unit in the nest of Chinese boxes that is at once so important and so accessible; a unit that can and must be clothed with great powers, if it is to manage its problems, and yet can be small enough so that citizens can participate extensively in determining the ways in which this great power will be used. Only the city, it seems to me, can avoid the extremes we began to confront some time back. For the city need not be so huge that, like the nation-state, it reduces participation to voting, nor so small that its activities are trivial.

The city has at least one more advantage: it has great potentialities as a unit for educating citizens in civic virtue or—if I must use a term that comes more readily to the lips of a contemporary political scientist—for political socialization.

We may be approaching a crisis in the socialization of citizens into the political life of the democratic nation-state, a crisis that the challenges of nation-building, democratization, and overcoming the most blatant evils of industrialism have delayed or obscured. There are signs of malaise among young people, among the very citizens who shortly before the dawn of the 21st Century will have become—to use the word that has now become a mindless cliché—the establishment. If the malaise were only American, one could put it down to television, over-permissive child-rearing, the persistence of an unpopular and ugly war, or other causes more or less specific to the United States; but there are signs of this malaise among youth in almost all the democratic countries.

I am not going to try to explain here a phenomenon too complex for brief analysis. But a part of the phenomenon—I don't know how much it is symptom and how much underlying cause—is a belief that the government of the nation-state is remote, inaccessible, and unresponsive, a government of professionals in

which only a few can ever hope to participate actively and a still smaller number can ever gain great influence after years of dedication to political life.

What we need, what they need, and what some of them are trying to create (often with incredible ignorance of elementary political wisdom) is a political unit of more truly human proportions in which a citizen can acquire confidence and mastery of the arts of politics—that is, of the arts required for shaping a good life in common with fellow citizens. What Pericles said of Athens, that the city is in general a school of the Grecians, may be said of every city of moderate size: it is a marvelous school. I have no doubt that a modern city even of moderate size is a good deal more complicated than Athens was. It has a much greater need for highly trained professionals, permanent administrative agencies, full-time leaders. Yet in the main, its problems are, I believe, within reach of the average citizen. And I believe it may be easier for citizens to reason about the good life and the ways to reach it by thinking in the more immediate and palpable context of the city than in the context of the nation-state or international politics. Even if solving the problems of the city is not quite enough for the good life, it is a great, indispensable, and comprehensible prerequisite.

## VII

What I have presented is not a program but a perspective, not a prophecy but a prospect. It is not a solution to the problems of the city or of democracy, but a viewpoint from which to look at the problems of democracy and the city. It does not lead directly to the answers, it might nonetheless help one to see the questions.

I have already suggested one implication of this way of looking at things—if popular governments in the modern world are a series of Chinese boxes, then we obviously need different models, theories, and criteria of excellence for each. I may seem to be repeating only what was commonly said nearly two centuries ago as ideas about representative government began to develop, that we cannot judge representative government in the nation-state as if it were or could be democracy in a committee, or, for that matter, a town meeting. Yet it is interesting to me that we have made so little of these palpable and evidently inherent differences in the performance of different kinds of units, all of which we are prone to call democratic.

Yet if the democratic city lies somewhere between democracy in the committee or in the

town meeting and representative government in the nation-state, then it would be important to know what the similarities and differences are, and what standards of excellence we can apply to one but not the other. Even the democratic city, I fear, cannot satisfy anyone who has a vision of leaderless and partyless democracy, for at its best the politics of the democratic city will be more like a competitive polyarchy than a committee; organized parties and interest groups are more likely to exist than the free and spontaneous formation and dissolution of groups for every issue; a full-time leader or activist will exert more influence than any of his followers; institutionalized conflict is more likely than uncoerced consensus. Yet these are hunches that do no more than point to new worlds that need exploring.

The perspective I have been describing also bears on the way we think about units of government intermediate between nation-state and city. An American obviously must take the 50 states into account. These are too solidly built to be done away with and I don't propose to break any lances tilting against them. Yet in the perspective I am suggesting the states do not stand out as important institutions of democratic self-government. They are too big to allow for much in the way of civic participation—think of California and New York, each about as large in population as Canada or Yugoslavia and each larger than 80% of the countries of the world. Yet an American state is infinitely less important to citizens of that state than any democratic nation-state is to its citizens. Consequently the average American is bound to be much less concerned about the affairs of his state than of his city or country. Too remote to stimulate much participation by their citizens, and too big to make extensive participation possible anyway, these units intermediate between city and nation are probably destined for a kind of limbo of quasi-democracy. They will be pretty much controlled by the full-time professionals, whether elected or appointed. Moreover, many of the problems that states have to deal with will not fit within state boundaries. It cannot even be said that the states, on the whole, can tap any strong sentiments of loyalty or like-mindedness among their citizens. Doubtless we shall continue to use the states as important intermediate instruments of coordination and control—if for no other reason than the fact that they are going institutions. But whenever we are compelled to choose between city and state, we should always keep in mind, I think, that the city, not the state, is the better instrument of popular government.

This argument also applies to megalopolis, to the city that is *not* a city, to the local government that is *not* a local government. The city of New York, for example, has about the same population as Sweden or Chile. It is twice as large as Norway, three times the size of New Zealand. To regard the government of New York as a local government is to make nonsense of the term. If the Swedes were to rule their whole country from Stockholm with no local governments, I am quite sure that we would begin to question whether the people of Sweden could rightly be called self-governing. Where, we might ask the Swedes, are your local governments? But should we not ask the same thing of New Yorkers: Where are *your* local governments? For purely historical and what to me seem rather irrational reasons, we continue to regard the government of the giant metropolis as if it were a local government, when we might more properly consider it as the equivalent of a state or a provincial government—and hence badly in need of being broken up into smaller units for purposes of local government. If it turns out that the government of a metropolis cannot be decentralized to smaller territorial units, then should we not quite openly declare that the metropolis cannot ever be made into a democratic city? This may be an inconvenient truth, but if it is true, it may be—like much truth—liberating in the end.

Yet I must admit that problems like these involving the metropolis demand more than we now know. The metropolis is a world to be explored, so let us explore it, hoping that we may discover how even it might be turned into a democratic city.

### VIII

There are many questions that I shall have to leave unanswered. I could plead lack of time, but the fact is I don't know the answers, nor perhaps does anyone else quite yet.

There is above all the question that now overshadows all else in American life of how we shall solve the problems presented by race, poverty, inequality, discrimination, and centuries of humiliation. No failure in American society has been as enduring, as profound, as visible, as corrosive, as dangerous, and as tragic as our refusal to enable black Americans to share in equal measure with white Americans the realities of the American dream. Now this problem has become central to the whole future of our cities and indeed to the future of the country. I scarcely need to say that unless and until it is solved neither we nor our children nor our grandchildren nor any future

generation can have anything like a decent urban life.

There is also the question of how the city can acquire adequate resources, particularly funds, without becoming excessively subordinated to higher levels of government. The bloc grant is a very promising solution, but only if grants are made directly to the cities and not, as is often proposed, exclusively to the states. In the perspective that I have been suggesting, to think of the states as the natural and exclusive recipients of bloc grants is anachronistic; for if the autonomy that is promised by the bloc grant is desirable for states—those barely democratic units in the limbo—autonomy is all the more desirable, and indeed necessary, if citizens are to enjoy the power to shape their cities.

A third question is how to control the size of cities. If there is an optimum size in the broad range from about 50,000 to about 200,000, as I have suggested further inquiry might show, then how can cities be maintained within this range—to say nothing of breaking up the giant metropolis? Typically, the people who influence decisions about the future of cities have acted on the simple-minded axiom: the bigger the better. This is most notably true here in America where the rational prospect of great gain encourages an almost pathological obsession with the virtues of sheer bigness, as if the very bigness of the city, the height of its buildings, and the crowds on its streets must somehow outweigh all squalor and ugliness. There seems to be a fear, too, that the moment we stop growing we start to die, a half truth that overlooks the fact that in nature the mouse and the sparrow have outlasted the brontosaurus and the sabre-toothed tiger. There are, I suspect, all sorts of devices we could use to control the growth of a city when it reaches the optimum range. These need to be explored, but they will be of little use until we decide that this is what we really want to do.

A closely related though much more formidable question is how we can make the legal boundaries of a city coincide more closely with what might be called its sociological boundaries. As I suggested earlier, our view up to now has been passive or defeatist: we say that we must constantly change legal boundaries to fit social boundaries. But as I tried to suggest with my fantasy of a Constitutional Convention, this way lies madness; for the legal boundaries must be extended until they cover the whole globe, which, whatever else it may be, cannot be a complete substitute for smaller territorial units. In general, the political autonomy allowed a territorial unit is likely to

be less, the higher the amount of interaction with others outside the legal boundaries. In building nations or international systems, the greater the interaction; and consequently the less “real” the significance of local boundaries, the easier the task. Yet if we are to build democratic cities with enough autonomy to permit their citizens to participate extensively in significant decisions about their environment, we must somehow reverse the tendency for the legal boundaries of the city to lose all social and economic significance. Nor can we simply go on creating separate authorities for each problem. Obviously different problems call for different boundaries, and we may have to live in a network of authorities. Yet the indefinite multiplication of units of government is bound to fragment the control of the ordinary citizen over a broad range of policies.

The problem of fragmented authority touches closely upon another, the problem of decentralization of authority and power within the city. Even in a city in the range from 50,000–200,000 political participation is reduced for most people to nothing more than voting in elections—as it is in the representative government of the nation-state—unless there are smaller units within which citizens can from time to time formulate and express their desires, consult with officials, and in some cases participate even more fully in decisions. Unfortunately, I can only indicate the problem; I have no answers to it. There are a number of proposals floating around for creating smaller participatory units in the city, the oldest and most popular candidate being the neighborhood; and there are even some interesting experiments of this kind going on. So far as I know none of the proposals or experiments triumph over the universal tendency for a few activists to engage in most of the overt activities while the rest participate only sporadically, symbolically, or not at all. Although this limitation seems to me to deflate rather cruelly the most grandiose and utopian claims for citizen participation, and in addition raises serious problems, I do not think it is a reason for rejecting these efforts and experiments out of hand, if we are aiming not for committee democracy but, as I suggested a moment ago, a degree of participation so great and so fairly spread about that no one feels neglected and everyone feels, with justice, that his viewpoint has been pretty fairly attended to. To aim for the point at which practically everyone in the city believes with good reason that his claims ordinarily receive a fair hearing, and decisions, even

when adverse to his claims, have been arrived at with understanding and sympathy, is already so distant and so splendid a goal that I am quite content to leave the exploration of what lies beyond it to someone in the 21st Century.

If there were time, I know that one could turn up more questions, more problems, more obstacles. We might even conclude that the fifth high tide of democracy, the age of the democratic city in the democratic republic, is not after all in our destiny.

Or it may be within the possibilities of other countries, but not our own, to achieve in the rest of this century what the Greeks did

2500 years ago, to develop an urban civilization founded on the democratic city, only consistent this time with the imperatives of modern technology, the existence of representative governments ruling over huge populations and territories, and the extension of constitutionalism and the rule of law to vast areas of the earth—ultimately, perhaps, to the globe itself.

Yet even if no one can say whether this will ever come about, or where, for everyone stirred by the prospect of shaping politics now toward the good life in the 21st Century—or at least toward a better life—the opportunities lie all around.