A talk by

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DEMOCRACY AS METHOD AND ACCIDENT

The chances of any two definitions of democracy being alike are about the same as Lunik meeting Pioneer in space. Nevertheless, there is always some point to a definition, since you may know generally from it what kind of social system I am talking about. So let me say that a democracy exists whenever most of the people in a society say it does. For history, you simply review all that contemporaries had to say, especially counting the number of times people said smugly,"This is a democracy"or scornfully, "This is a democracy". For the present, you merely take a poll.

A small problem occurs in certain republics as in ancient Rome; there you would have to substitute the phrase "a people's republic" much as some of our modern communist states do. And if people seem to be quite unfamiliar with anything approaching this term, but continue to speak of themselves as "His Majesty's loyal subjects" or some such identity, well then, we are not treating with a democracy.

I suppose that those who will be most irritated by this definition will be those who take a special pride in being strongly democratic. "Democracy," they will think, "is a jewel of many facets; it is peace, prosperity, freedom, rule by the people." Perhaps, and perhaps many other things too, good and bad. All the more reason therefore to take some simple indicator for such a complex phenomenon. A column of mercury will indicate the temperature, but doesn't say much about the weather. Besides, why is it absurd for the

people, who are supposed to have some active connection with democracy, to say whether they live in one?

I.

However, it is not to jibe the true believers in democracy that I am here. I have something more general and theoretical in mind, and that is to demonstrate that the myriad phenomena or events that are sometimes associated with democracy originate from four general conditions of society. After we have performed this large sorting job, we can pay attention finally to judging the qualities of democracy -- past, present, and future.

1. Universal Behaviors

The first order of so-called democratic activity consists of human behavior that is nearly universal. Only a common variety of self-deception leads to its being identified with democracy. Let us take the sense of brotherhood and the practice of charity? How democratic is it? The greatest intensity of this feeling is an emotion found in tribes and ancient villages, and in religious orders and sects. Its widest extensity is found in the Christian preaching of universal brotherhood of workers. But also recall that the Nazis preached the unity of "blut und boden" of all Germans. And ask oneself, if one were to fall fainting on a street of Washington, D. C., would he likely be the object of more solicitude than if he collapsed on a Moscow street? But what of Geneva, Switzerland, or London in the 18th century, or Athens in the fourth century before Christ? Many relative conditions would determine the treatment accorded him. It would probably be incorrect to expect that in those societies reputed by their people to be democratic there would be some excess of this divine trait.

As with charity, so with other universal social occurrences. the maintenance of social order and social peace; patriotism; respect for the old; love for the young; romantic mating; and private property. Similarly, it is just and necessary to add, there are many disreputable behaviors of this general type that are mistakenly connected with democracy by self-designated anti-democrats. In sum there are some widespread

desires and behaviors that characterize societies of whatever name, democratic, tyrannical, despotic, republican, monarchic, aristocratic, oligarchic, gerontocratic, communist, socialist, or facist.

2. Accidents of History

A second class of phenomena, which some would identify with a particular form of government, might better be called accidents of history. These affect or can affect societies of all types. I speak of wars, famines, plagues and their opposites, peace, prosperity, and well-being. Also, of advantageous geographic locations of societies for trading and commerce, and of the presence of valuable resources of water, oil, arable land per capita, iron, coal. Baron de Montesquieu wrote two centuries ago of the influence of climate and location on government. Since then, generations of democratic theorists have more and more neglected the political consequences of these accidents, puffing themselves up proudly for having determined their own political fate. They have been like the character in the comic opera, HMS Pinafore of whom the chorus boasts that he could have been born a Roosian, a Greek or Turk or Proosian; but he chose instead to be born an Englishman. Would Germany have continued democratic after 1932 if there had been no depression and it had possessed an English Channel between itself and Poland and Russia? Probably so. Did the decline of the Oriental trade, owing on the one had to the new strength of the Turks, and on the other hand to the discovery of new routes to the East, contribute to the decline of the Venetian Republic? Probably so. What forms of government would the Northern States and the Confederacy now have if the Union had been permanently broken? Perhaps nothing that could be readily identified with our present forms.

3. Non-political Practices

It will be noted that both the class of events called the universal order of things and that called the accidents of history have been largely beyond the capacities of men to control. The same is not quite so true of a third class of phenomena that I would call the nonpolitical practices of a society. In this class, I would [illegible] on the examples of high social mobility, of technical skills, and of managerial skills.

Peoples that would not call themselves democratic have possessed plenty of individual opportunities. All it takes to create more chances in life is to suffer a great plague such as has occurred times beyond number. Those who survive can get ahead. I wondered as a boy, how so many undertakers of the dead could be recruited during plagues. I later realized that here were jobs with opportunities; they were the first to perceive benefits to be obtained. It was what we in the army used to term sardonically, "combat pay", first chance at the property of prisoners and the dead. That brilliant giant of social theory, Vilfredo Pareto, spoke of the neo-malthusianism of the wealthy. The rich had fewer children than the poor, thus giving more of the poor a chance to climb in society. If the rich had more children than the poor, where would the poor find opportunities to rise?

Freedom of opportunity is often spoken of in connection with democracy, but, as we are saying, it is largely uncontrolled, and furthermore is often a boast of anti-democrats. The privates in Napoleon's army were told that they carried a marshal's baton in their knapsacks. The fascist leaders of the 1930's were frequently themselves of undistinguished origins, and they spurred many men upwards in important sectors of society, such as the military forces, the bureaucracy, industry, and politics.

Nor are technical skills in mechanics, biology, or propaganda largely the property of democracies. The Egyptians, pre-democratic Romans, Carthaginians, and pre-democratic Englishmen, Frenchmen, Spaniards, Russians, Germans, Japanese rated highly. It would be a waste of time to determine whether the Italian geniuses of the Renaissance came from a principality or a republic. Nor would anyone here recall, I daresay, whether Socrates was raised under a democracy or a tyranny, whether Aristotle was; whether Democritus, Pythagoras, Hippocrates.

Similarly with managerial skills. We pride ourselves in fathering a new approach to administration-the human relations approach. But when you come down to it, we pride ourselves much more in the way we have taken over all the great ancient ways of organizing and controlling men for the performance of work and improved upon them, including using

the language of democracy to describe the process. Every nation of advanced organization today calls itself automatically democratic, so we cannot cite them, and must go to history, for instance the Prussian monarchy and the ancien regime of France; here were highly advanced management centers. And if other people are too stupid to practice administration as we know it can be done, it is not because they are undemocratic, but for other reasons, such as, for example, that they are stupid, that is, they cannot master the reasoning processes nor can they take a mechanical view of human organization.

When we talk about these skills, however, we are getting close to some of the features of social life that we can control. We have at least hold of the tail of the corpus of scientific administration. It is interesting and highly significant that the applied social science of administration is the oldest body of rationally governable knowledge that man has. It emanates probably from a primeval demand for sheer domination, and goes on from there.

4. The Science of Democracy.

When we come to other ways of ordering human relations, we find a much more difficult set of problems, and here of course is where we encounter all of those noble attempts of man to put into practice meanings of words such as democracy. Behind this class of phenomena, the last on our list of four, is the same desire to control social relations that underlies the technical skills found in management. This is where the search for a science of democracy goes on. In this area man must be considerably more rational and clever than in traditional forms of administration. Many basic rules of administration are almost instinctual. They are easily discoverable and easily applied. The principle of hierachy of command is a case in point. It is an invention that perhaps sprang naturally from the family by analogy, but could have an extremely wide range of applications. Would brotherly love be the same kind of semi-instinctual development coming out of the family? Probably not, because command was primitively a more important function in the family than non-sexual love, and furthermore love is more difficult to organize as a social practice than power.

This is no place for a disquisition on such matters, but I should be obliged if you would accept for the moment the hypothesis that the sentiments that give rise to the things called democratic are more difficult to put into effect; and therefore, especially with regards to a society larger than the ancient city-state, a science of democracy must come at a much later stage of history.

There are two phases to this democratic stage; the primitive and the scientific. We are presently, as our ancestors have been, in the primitive phase of democracy. In this phase, any new device to reform human relations -- such as a way of voting, consenting, deciding, rewarding people, punishing them, distributing the collective product and so on -- is likely to be too crude to work, superstitiously regarded, and an object of irrelevant passions.

Estimating the whole extent of man's experience with primitive democracy is impossible at this time, precisely because of what has just been said: man cannot view his experiences with democracy objectively. All he can see are the thunderbolts and brilliant sunlight, the rivers of blood and the awful personages of history. Men slew one another one time over counting ballots openly or in secret. Today the issue is dead. All accept the secret ballot. No one thinks about it from year to year. If it were threatened, however, many would rise to its defense in blind fury. But they would have little notion of the consequences of a secret as opposed to an open ballot under varied conditions.

There are perhaps a hundred distinct variables in any voting system and several possible variation of each. In addition, there are hundreds of various ways of organizing people to do work according to some of the principles of human relations in administration; there are hundreds of variables associated with the conduct of political parties, the cabinet of the executive branch, and legislative processes; the same is true of religious organization, business organization, the organization of markets, regulation of business, organizing the armed forces, organizing education and science, governing labor unions, and conducting diplomacy. The total number of variable factors, if considered as distinct and unrelated, is fantastically high. Is there a set of democratic principles to be applied

in all of these reaches of government? And, if so, has applied social science reached a point where it can help measurably to realize such principles in action?

Over a century ago, Auguste Comte, the father of modern sociology, first expressed methodically the theory of the new age that would make positive use of science for ordering society. St. Simon is a second distinguished progenitor of the idea of a managed society in which human relations might be controlled according to known principles of behavior, much as the elements of nature have been controlled. In the twentieth century, the United States became the leading exponent in practice of this concept of applied social science. It is so today, and only several European nations have sufficient vitality in social science even to understand what it is all about.

The Soviet Union is not among them. I should place her a century behind us in social science; where Russia has gotten she has gone by sheer force, by will, by powerful superstitious religion. She has mastered some of the primitive principles of human control, such as have been known for a millenium, and she has perfected them according to the ideas of the nineteenth century. Each month reinforces me in these opinions through my editorial work on the journal, Political Research: Organization and Design. In order to select progressive articles having some bearing upon government, I scan the latest issues of over 250 magazines from all over the world. About 80 per cent of those chosen for citation are American. Only in the United States are we anywhere near to adopting a positive science of man and democracy.

Nevertheless, I shouldn't be at all surprised if we should fail, and man, two thousand years hence, should examine these peculiar works much as we examine those of the Golden Age of Athens, wondering what finally stopped the spearhead of the great Greek intelligence. I should say this, jumping ahead to that future age, that we know enough about man just now to give answers that the Greeks couldn't give to their own failures.

We shall possibly fail, and relapse. Under the best of conditions, our running edge of knowledge is still too narrow to manage society. At the same time, our science

is conspicuous enough to create by each success as much hostility as good will. In addition, whatever is rationally accomplished, that is, done with purpose and under controls, must contend with all the uncontrollable forces of the total social order in the modern world, the accidents of history, the heritage of mountains of custom surrounded by the thorn forests of tradition and mental and moral incapacity. At no one moment can much at all be done. Extraordinary lengths of fruitful, usable time must pass before a sizable accrual can be credited to the new order of doing things. Meanwhile, man too keeps changing. We see how little we understand of our fathers, and how much less of our children, and we comprehend that it is highly presumptuous to expect a steady application of a new way of looking at society.

Yet I agree with John Dewey, who swept the inventory of two centuries of democratic gimcracks off the shelves, saying that democracy is something very general. It is a method of people dealing with other people; it is a sum of all approaches in all fields of life and not some absolute set of mechanical contrivances such as annual voting, universal suffrage, and republicanism. Democracy, he said, is achieved by the practice of social communion. When people understand one another and what is going on, and the consequences of social behavior are generally understood and taken into account in public affairs, democracy will be achieved.

By this theory, then, and I agree with it, the best form of government to come (let it be called democracy for the moment) will depend utterly upon a vast social intelligence in which a very numerous sector of society will be social technicians of one kind or another. It will be these people, constituting perhaps ten times as many proportionately as they do at present, who will take soundings for our society as it proceeds and make adjustments, on order. This kind of person must be multiplied, and put to work vigorously in every major area of life, under a large plan, or consensus, and with a coordination directed by priority and economic considerations. Only then will we have a society that, without being absurd, can call itself by a favored term such as democracy and deserve some credit for its creation.

By this canon, all the democracies of the past have been so labelled by having certain traits ascribed to them by historians, or by the people who lived in them. They have all been infrequent and fortuitous events, judged in passion, favorable or unfavorable. England is still living

off the fat of Empire, that is the wealth and the skills her people received from conquering and dominating peoples. Her reputation as a democracy is not yet secure. If numbers of active participants in government is taken as any criteria of democracy, she has been democratic only since her world position began to decline. She never became in any absolute sense democratic until a few years ago. Until now she has given a voice to a few million Englishmen while administering as inferiors ten times as many million people. It's as if New York City ran the United States and called itself a democracy because its citizens alone vote and engage in politics. I should think that a businessman who prays to God on Sunday and preys upon his fellowmen the rest of the week is not to be called Christian; nor should one who calls himself democratic vote in annual elections but then daily rule his employees as unthinking machines. A complete democracy in any terms has never been experienced.

II.

However, I am already showing signs of abandoning my original definition of democracy for a more involved and moral one. The time has come to make this change directly. My original definition of a democracy as any society whose people said it was such, is useful in examining the pattern of past practices. It frees us of doctrines and preconceptions; of being tied to certain countries, times, and persons. But it leaves us without direction; now it is demanded of us that we ignore the chronic failures of the past and, putting on a brave front, project our values into the future with the hope that our new instruments of navigation will enable us to reach them someday.

I have said something about scientific method and the possibilities of the new social sciences. What results would these methods be intended to bring about? What effects do we desire to produce?

I should settle for a society with four features and call it democratic and like it.

Democracy is charitable

In the democratic society, people should be charitable beyond anything known in the past. They should go out of

their way to be friendly, turn the other cheek at least once each time, and displace hostilities upon no man. It is ironic and tragic that just as we are on the verge of learning how to teach charity and favor its expression, after two thousand years of wishing that we knew how, the term itself is regarded as passe and the concept ridiculous. The prime goal here is to revive an understanding of charity and instil it in children from infancy.

Democracy affords equality of opportunity.

Secondly, the democratic society should afford equality of opportunity. This doctrine has its pitfalls. No two people ever have equal opportunity, and a society would collapse if it tried to achieve such a levelling and homogeneity of chances. But it should be conceivable that a Negro child on a Mississippi,one-mule farm might be President. It should be conceivable that a private in the army ultimately lead it, that a laborer's son in Oregon become a distinguished professor at Harvard, or that s shopkeeper's boy become as rich as John D. Rockefeller, Jr. If these things are not conceivable, they should be made to be by a little better social provision. If one could say the same things about a girl-child, so much the better.

At the same time, I think it would be incorrect to agitate society by endeavors to guarantee a given rate of mobility. Let those who wish to try go ahead; let those who do not, alone. I speak of a high permissible rate of social mobility. Above all, let the spirit of charity pervade the difficult tensions of social climbing and descending, so that a person is assured that he may be as good where he is as where he might conceivably be.

Democracy maintains limited government.

A third feature of democratic society should be limited government. Perhaps I should say limited power. For I mean by this statement that, while settling any given issue, the power of anybody or any group to make determinations affecting others should be restricted as much as possible. In some future age of man there will be a scientific government that knows how to encourage all manner of intelligent choice; that acts as a great, though not compulsory, planner of society; that gets rid of functions as soon as their

course is set; that rests side by side often indistinguishably, with other major elements of society, such as industries, communities, cultural groupings and other governments. The word sovereignty will never be used. Constitutions will not be strait-jackets; they will be instruments for facilitating planning and cooperation. Lawyers, administrators, and journalists will be differently educated; they will not fatten upon conflict, negativism, and cynicism. Politicians will be experts in employing social science in the adjustment of conflict, planning, and implementing material and moral goals.

Democracy enjoys a rule of law.

Finally, the democratic society should enjoy a rule of law. By the rule of law, as Dicey called it, or juridical defense, as Mosca named it, is meant a high probability that any two persons randomly selected from the society would receive the same set of rights as plaintiffs or defendents in any case to which they might be party before the law. If companies, groups, or agencies were involved, they would receive the same rights as collectivities of their category -- that is, as all companies, unions, churches, and agencies would receive. The rule of law is a principal basis for the maintenance of confidence, morale, and morality in a society. Like the other traits here mentioned, it is a rare phenomenon in history and has often been missing from so-called democracies, and has been present in some aristocracies and monarchies.

Now, if in sum we should have such a society as this, with a persuasive spirit of charity, a high permissible rate of individual mobility, with limited power, and the rule of law, I should like to call it by the best name I could think of, and perhaps that would be "democracy". I think that such a society might be worthy of one's efforts. It would go a long way towards solving the political problems of man, though leaving him with his religious and aesthetic problems. He might be less ashamed on the day he first meets a "man from Mars."

If we keep in mind the goals of change, we should not need to suffer like superstitious peasants over the hundreds of changes that must be made in democracy as it has existed and now exists. We should rather be more concerned with, and enthusiastic about, the possible development of a social science through which we can improve old institutions and invent new ones -- all to a good end.