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INTRODUCTION: PUBLIC IGNORANCE AND DEMOCRATIC THEORY

This issue of *Critical Review* concerns something that is so obvious that virtually everyone probably notices it from time to time, yet so important that if we were to focus on it intently, it would overturn our understanding of politics and as well, quite possibly, many of our political commitments. The subject is the pervasiveness of popular ignorance about politics and government.

That the public is overwhelmingly ignorant when it comes to politics is not merely the despairing hypothesis of conservatives unable to understand the popularity of a Bill Clinton, or liberals unable to understand that of a Ronald Reagan. It is a discovery that has been replicated unfailingly by political scientists; indeed, it is one of the strongest findings that have been produced by any social science—possibly *the* strongest. Yet for all the rock-solid evidence behind it, the finding of public ignorance is little known to those whose business it is to analyze public opinion. Pollsters, pundits, journalists, and nonspecialist scholars routinely attribute movements in public opinion to the effect of subtle philosophical and policy debates that are, in reality, the purview of small elites—debates of which the general public usually has not the slightest knowledge. Similarly, elections are consistently overinterpreted as "mandates" for philosophical convictions or

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policy positions of which most voters are only dimly aware. (The vast majority of the 1994 U.S. electorate had not even heard of the "Contract with America" for which the victorious Republican party claimed a mandate; see Davidson and Oleszek 1996, 111.)

As Philip Converse showed in his pivotal contribution to the public-ignorance literature, "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics" (1964), most people's political opinions are based not on attention to high-flown political debate, but instead on extremely ill-informed judgments about "the nature of the times" (prosperity? peace?) and about the interests of the groups with which they identify. Since even these primitive judgments require information about what the nature of the times really is, or about what the effects of public policies on groups really are—and about who or what is responsible for the nature of the times or the effects of public policies—the door is wide open to the manipulation of public opinion by those who can spin this information in the simplest or otherwise most compelling way. Among these manipulators are government officials with access to the free media; candidates who can afford expensive advertising campaigns; and, less deliberately, journalists who inevitably must define and portray a given "issue" one way rather than another.

The failure of nonscholarly public-opinion analysts to recognize the fact of popular political ignorance probably stems from the analysts' own absorption in political information. Almost by definition, politically informed elites are much more interested in and familiar with political debates than the general public is. These elites see through spin more easily (at least when it conflicts with their political biases); they follow ongoing policy debates more carefully (which is to say, at all); and so, to them, the true insubstantiality of the mass public's reasoning about politics is almost unimaginable. The "disconnect" between elites and masses is hardly something that first became evident during the Year of Lewinsky. For instance, survey data and exit polling showed that Ronald Reagan was elected in 1980 because of bad economic times and dislike of President Carter, not approval of Reagan's conservatism (Schwab 1991, 42-44). Yet the bias toward more philosophically elevated interpretations of Reagan's "mandate" was so strong that the media felt compelled to report the 1980 election as a massive "shift to the right"—which is presumably why media personnel, aware of Reagan's ideology, would have voted for him, had they done so.

More recently we have been reminded, by the success of President Clinton's defenders, that in a democracy there is often no more persuasive argument than the circular appeal to public opinion itself. Timur Kuran's contribution to this issue—like his own research, assessed here by Philip Tetlock—concerns the stifling effects that can be produced by respect for the will of the people as such. One such effect is that bad ideas may be perpetuated by dissidents' fear of expressing criticisms that might prove upsetting to other people.

The Triumph of the Will

Public ignorance poses two direct threats to the legitimacy of democratic government. These two threats correspond to two different rationales for democracy.

The first rationale might be called "democratic voluntarism." This is the commonplace view that the public is sovereign and therefore has a *right* to exercise its will through democratic procedures, regardless of the outcome (at least as long as the outcome doesn't threaten those procedures or the rights of individuals). This view presupposes the existence of a public will. But Converse found that the public is so ignorant of politics that in many cases, its political attitudes are highly unstable. If attitudes are so evanescent as to be almost nonexistent, then there may be no public will at all.

Most of the scholarly reaction to Converse has taken the form of debate over this "nonattitudes" thesis. Preoccupation with whether or not the public has attitudes at all has prompted many writers to assume that all they need do to defend democracy from the threat posed by public ignorance is demonstrate that a given public has some core set of stable beliefs. One need only read Robert Shapiro's discussion below of the most important post-Converse work of public-opinion scholarship, John Zaller's *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*, to grasp the extent of public ignorance, even if it does not sink to the level of "nonattitudes." But in worrying about the nonattitudes thesis, such discussions subtly shift the focus away from the *quality* of the public "will." As Shapiro and Zaller both note, the mere existence of relatively stable public attitudes tells us nothing about how well informed these attitudes are. A willful public, like a willful individual, can be—and, as both Shapiro's and Zaller's work confirms, usually is—utterly ignorant (Page and Shapiro 1992; Zaller 1992). But

because democratic voluntarism cannot, by its very nature, allow itself to question the *content* of what the public wills—since in the voluntarist view, the will of the majority is sovereign, regardless of content—the issue of the wisdom of democratic decisions has tended to live in the shadows of the public-opinion literature. All specialists know that public ignorance lurks there, but their attention is usually distracted from it by peripheral matters, including the nonattitudes question.

An exception is the attention devoted to whether public ignorance permits the manipulation or manufacture of public opinion by media and political elites. Democratic voluntarists care about this because they see opinion manipulation as necessarily bad: it means that the will of a few is taking the place of the will of the majority. The empirical evidence of such "media effects" is incisively reviewed here by Richard Anderson, who draws some surprising inferences from it. Anderson points out that public ignorance is what gives the media their vast power over public opinion. And he underscores the conflict between deliberation and participation: the wider the participating population, the likelier it is to be too ignorant of politics to be able to deliberate intelligently, because far more people are ignorant about politics than are knowledgeable about it. But Anderson concludes that participation, not deliberation, should be our goal, regardless of the ignorance of the participants, because their political involvement may force politicians to cater to them by enacting desirable reforms. Indeed, media effects might be a good thing, Anderson suggests, as long as they bring about more participation—for example, by making politics more understandable, even at the price of oversimplifying it.

Anderson's argument brings into sharp relief the tension between voluntarism and the other rationale for democracy, which might be called "instrumentalism." Instrumentalists value the effects of democracy, not its embodiment of the popular will per se. At their most ambitious, democratic instrumentalists hold that democracy can safeguard the public interest. Anderson believes that the public interest lies in the expansion of individual liberty, and he draws on U.S. history to conclude that this interest will be promoted by the type of reforms that are spurred by a broad electorate. Although the expansion of liberty is a less robust version of the public interest than most instrumentalists would accept, Anderson can still be seen as an instrumentalist because, according democracy no inherent value, he measures its desirability against its production of something else

(freedom). But if the electorate is grossly uninformed, as Anderson believes it to be, it is possible that the reforms it engenders may not turn out to be positive ones according to any standard—unless, contrary to Anderson's intent, *whatever* reforms the people will are seen as positive. Thus, his position illustrates the difficulty of squaring an instrumentalist rationale for democracy with the fact of public ignorance. Any non-tautological conception of the public good must have some content; if democracy is to be instrumental to this content, the *demos* must make judgments about facts; but it is factual information about nearly everything political that the *demos* lacks.

Defenders of democracy may be inclined by this problem to retreat to democratic voluntarism, since it imposes no knowledgeability requirement on the *demos*. But the possibility of "nonattitudes" is not the only difficulty with voluntarism, despite the attention it continues to receive. The deeper problem is one of philosophical incoherence, as indicated by the circularity of appeals to public opinion as criteria of the public good. Richard Wollheim pointed out in "A Paradox in the Theory of Democracy" (1972) that the voter is in the strange position of voting not on the basis of what is objectively good, but rather on the basis of what the majority thinks good—if, as democratic voluntarism holds, the will of the majority is intrinsically rather than instrumentally valuable. But if whatever the majority decides becomes good by virtue of that decision (e.g., Walzer 1981), how could a majority decide anything at all? Whatever it decided would become good automatically; but prior to the majority's decision, lacking an external good toward which its decision could be directed instrumentally, voters would have no basis for choice.

A voluntarist may answer that one should vote one's "preferences," but this is a non sequitur: what the voter wants to know is what she *should* prefer. Voluntarists may therefore be tempted to turn to theories of positive autonomy, as opposed to the negative freedom to pursue preferences. Autonomy theory, when applied to democratic decisions, would hold that one should let one's "authentic" or "deep" identity, as opposed to transitory preferences, determine one's vote. In its liberal version, autonomy theory would maintain that each individual should vote her individual long-term values; in the communitarian version, she should vote the long-term values of her community. But this solution continues to mistake what is valued (whether by the individual or the community) for what is valuable. Consequently, it does not solve the problem of indeterminacy, for each de-

cision about what to value today will affect what appears, tomorrow, to be the individual's or the community's long-term identity. If, by accidentally departing from yesterday's values, one would accord legitimacy to this departure tomorrow, why should one not be able *deliberately* to depart from yesterday's values, achieving, over the long run, the same self-validation for the departure? If it were legitimate to do so, however, the criterion of "authenticity" would lose all determinate content: since today's departure from yesterday's identity helps constitute tomorrow's identity, anything goes. Unless one inexplicably privileges an originary moment (e.g., a constitutional founding) as sacred, and refuses to accept either that it had a prehistory or that any deviation from it is justifiable, one's "identity," individual or collective, is merely a baroque version of the indeterminate voluntarist "preferences" it is supposed to remedy.

The source of the indeterminacy is that voluntarism (ironically) fails to take seriously the freedom of the will. A voter with free will requires a decision criterion; but for such a criterion ("the good") to be a *motivating* criterion, it must (putatively) be *valid*. And if it is valid, then there is no reason, in principle, to allow a majority using a different, invalid conception of the good as its decision criterion to prevail, as democratic voluntarism requires. Thus, there is an inherent contradiction between the *fact* of free will and the voluntarist *normative* apotheosis of free decisions. Free will requires that we decide on the basis of putative goods whose validity is taken to be anterior to our decision; but if free decisions are intrinsically valuable, they effectively render valid whatever our criterion of the good is *posterior* to the decision. If whatever the majority decides *becomes* good by virtue of its approval by the majority, then the majority, or its members, have no way of deciding what is good prior to the vote. If, on the contrary, one has free will, one votes on the basis of what appears to be good. But in that case, one has no basis in principle for accepting majority decisions that appear to be bad. A free agent might, of course, allow that, as a practical matter, she should should defer to the majority even when it is wrong—in the interest of serving the true good in an imperfect world, where trying to impose the good on the majority would be counterproductive. But this type of rationale for democracy, like the sixteenth-century *politiques'* justification for religious toleration, is instrumentalist.

By favoring the will of the people over any independent criterion of the good that might motivate its free will, voluntarist democrats implicitly deny that the people's will is free; for if it were, it would

have to be motivated by the independent goodness of what it aimed at. The presupposition of a claim to independent goodness is that the claim might be false (it is a truth claim), and thus that any given majority might be wrong. In short, the presupposition of free choice is that one may err—which the democratic voluntarist cannot allow, when the "one" in question is the people. The metaphysical implication of the voluntarist democrat's metaethics, then, is determinism. We see this at ground level in the privileging by democratic cultures of both individual and collective "values" and "preferences" as ends that cannot be questioned normatively and that, therefore, motivate people not freely, but as a matter of their incorrigible "identities."

Constraining Democracy?

Where democratic voluntarism emphasizes collective will and therefore communal identity, *liberal* voluntarism requires that the collective will allow freedom to the individual will. Thus, liberal voluntarists demand that democracy respect the "human liberties" to which Anderson maintains that democracy is instrumental. Where straightforward voluntarist democrats accord legitimacy to any democratic decision (at least if it does not stymie future democratic decisions), liberals constrain such decisions so they do not interfere with individual rights.[1] Autonomy-based versions of liberal democracy similarly constrain voluntarism: they require democratic decisions to be consistent with the "authentic" values of the individual—which can be, depending on the theorist, either the individual's own "deepest" values or those of her community.

Since the manipulation of either individual or collective opinion could lead to the enactment of illiberal or inauthentic preferences, liberal and autonomy theories achieve critical distance from the decisions of real-world democracies. But this is not the critical distance achieved by democratic instrumentalism; thus, the criterion that leads autonomy theorists to oppose opinion manipulation remains the freedom of the people to do whatever they "authentically" want to do. As Tom Hoffman's important paper suggests, both autonomy theorists and instrumentalists want politics to serve some good that is higher than the aggregation of mere individual preferences. Both camps condemn as "irrational" those decisions of the *demos* that, while instrumental to individuals' actual ends, are not instrumental to

good ends. But in the case of the autonomy theorists, the good ends toward which democracy is supposed to lead are equated with the unmanipulated values of either individuals or their communities. Whatever the people *really* will, consistent with their individual or collective identity, is, *ipso facto*, "rational." (Indeed, in the final analysis, the communitarian versions of autonomy theory are not so different from the individualistic versions, because an unmanipulated public opinion is one that expresses what the communitarians maintain are the collectively formed preferences *individuals* would express if they were really free.) Both forms of autonomy theory suffer the same debility that afflicts straightforward democratic and liberal voluntarism: the impossibility of finding a decision criterion if decisions—be they the decisions of the people or of the person—are, by virtue of being freely willed (either in the negative sense of being uncoerced or in the positive sense of being unmanipulated), self-validating. In short, the only way to escape the voluntarist conundrum is to make a clean break with the idea that *either* the free or the autonomous decisions of *either* the individual or the community are intrinsically valuable. The alternative is to see individual or collective sovereignty as, at best, instrumental to some good other than the sovereign agent's ability to choose among goods: instrumental, that is, to a good such as truth, beauty, or happiness.

Once one judges political systems by their instrumental efficacy in achieving such an end, however, the manipulation of opinion cannot be seen as inherently bad. Manipulation may, in some cases, actually be good—if it leads the public in a good direction. (This is close to Anderson's view.) But a democracy that is instrumental to the good only because it is manipulated by good elites is hardly a *true* democracy.

The real problem, in instrumentalist eyes, is not manipulation but the ignorance that makes it possible. An ignorant public is unlikely to choose policies or leaders that are instrumental to the good (whatever the good is). Opinion manipulation, like the nonexistence of stable "attitudes," should, according to the instrumentalist, be seen not as evil in itself but as a sign that the *demos* should not be trusted.

The False Allure of Elitism—and Populism

Thus, it might seem that rule by experts, not by the people, would be the best course for an instrumentalist to recommend. The only re-

maining questions would be those that concerned premodern political theory: how to separate knowledgeable rulers from the ignorant ruled, and how to ensure that the rulers use their knowledge wisely—to secure "the good."

One of the underappreciated contributions of "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics," however, is Converse's demonstration that in the real world of modern politics, the alternative to sheer ignorance is reliance on *ideology* to organize one's knowledge. The cognitive elite knows more about politics than the masses, but its superior knowledge is both enabled and "constrained" by the very belief systems, left and right, of which the masses are largely ignorant. Ideology tells ideologues what position to take on the "issue" *du jour* almost before the issue becomes known; as Converse (1964, 211) puts it, ideology tells us which positions "go with" which in the "'packages'" that the "consumers" of ideology "come to see as 'natural' wholes," but that are actually the products of acts of "creative synthesis" that can be carried off only by "a minuscule proportion of any population"—the Mills or Marxes or Hayeks who are the ultimate sources of ideologies. Ideologies are, in fact, simply more sophisticated heuristics than the primitive judgments of the "nature of the times" or "group interests" that guide the mass public.

The heuristic role of ideology suggests that even *relatively* knowledgeable elites are still ignorant, since they cannot judge the adequacy of their worldviews without abandoning ideology for an unattainable, universal expertise. While the "attitude constraint" made possible by ideology would, if more widespread, produce the stable public will that is so important to democratic voluntarists, ideological conviction can hardly be equated with the knowledge of the means to the good sought by instrumentalists. Thus, it is not at all evident that we would be (or are) better ruled by the knowledgeable but doctrinaire elite than by the ignorant but eclectic populace. Despite initial appearances, then, instrumentalism does not entail elitism.

In a pathbreaking contribution that draws on a vast body of empirical evidence, Ilya Somin suggests that there is an alternative to the Hobson's choice of rule by the ignorant or rule by the ideologues. Somin argues that by limiting the responsibilities of government, scarce public attention can be focused on a few issues, as it was focused in nineteenth-century America on such matters as the tariff and slavery. This, he maintains, might allow public decisions about these issues to be better informed. However, the harshly ideological

nature of the nineteenth-century battles revolving around such issues, and the terrible judgments the public often made about them, may illustrate a weakness in Somin's argument. Somin does not consider the danger of ideological rule: he objects to elitism only on the classic Utilitarian ground that elites may have different interests than the masses, such that his critique of popular ignorance is transmogrified into a critique of elite control over the state. By attempting to make the public more politically engaged, as it was in the nineteenth century, Somin finds himself recommending that the public become more like contemporary elites so as to take back control of government from them. In this, he overlooks the fact that even a public as relatively well informed as are contemporary elites would be led by its remaining ignorance to rely on the heuristic of ideology.

If one sees democracy as instrumental to the public good, one's goal should hardly be to encourage the public to treat politics as ideologues do. The fact that ideology allows people to integrate more information than they otherwise could is not sufficient to justify it. Information is not an end in itself, in the instrumentalist view: it is a means to the end of good decisions, which are unlikely if they are driven by the dogmatic, demagogic, demonizing attitude of the ideologue. The ideologue uses his relatively large store of political information as an arsenal for intellectual combat, not as a resource for open-minded and well-informed decision making.

This problem in Somin's analysis may be related to his attribution of public ignorance to people's rationality. Following Anthony Downs, Somin argues that democratic citizens have no incentive to spend resources (primarily time) on acquiring political information, because each citizen's vote has an infinitesimal chance of affecting the electoral outcome. Thus, Somin reasons, the cost of acquiring information should be reduced by cutting back the number of issues about which one needs to be well informed; this could be achieved by reducing the scope of government. But, in parallel fashion, the cost of acquiring information is currently reduced for political elites, because their preset ideologies make most political issues seem clearcut; acquiring relevant information (and screening out information that seems irrelevant because it does not fit into ideologically framed pigeonholes) is much less costly when one already knows what conclusions one is trying to reach. It may therefore be the case that only if we can *avoid* thinking of political ignorance as a matter of rationality

will we find a way to rectify ignorance that does not exacerbate the arguably worse problem of ideology.

As Somin acknowledges, one of the most powerful objections to the rational-ignorance argument is the fact that so many people do, in fact, vote. The voters' alleged recognition of the minuscule chance that their votes will matter underlies the claim that they are rationally ignorant: it is the unimportance of one's vote that renders it unimportant to be politically informed. But if voters recognize that it is unimportant to become well informed because their vote does not really count, why do they bother voting? Somin's main answer is that most voters overestimate the impact of their vote. But even somebody who overestimates the efficacy of the ballot will not bother to vote if she has no opinion about which outcome is desirable, and one cannot form such an opinion without a level of information one thinks adequate to justify it. So rational voters must be underestimating their ignorance as well as overestimating their political efficacy. To make rationality compatible with voting, then, one must reject the rational-ignorance hypothesis; one who thinks it rational to be ignorant would necessarily have to recognize her ignorance, and this would deprive her of the "attitudes" necessary to motivate her to vote. All those real-world rational voters must think it rational to be well informed. For even an effective vote is pointless if it is not informed, since it may produce results contrary to the voter's goal.

This is not to say that the relatively greater cost of being well informed, as opposed to merely voting, might not deter those who would otherwise inform themselves from doing so. But the costliness of being well informed would also deter these rational ignoramuses from voting. The sheer fact that people cast ballots out of a mistaken belief in their efficacy shows that they must also mistakenly believe that they are, in fact, adequately informed. So their ignorance cannot be attributed to their conclusion that acquiring adequate information is too costly.

The reality is that not only do many people vote, many people attempt to acquire political information (to varying degrees), and everyone who votes as a matter of instrumental rationality must think that by virtue of the information she has acquired, her vote is a worthwhile one. (Somin acknowledges that there are instrumentally irrational reasons for voting, such as the fulfilment of duty and the expression of emotion. But usually the duty in question is not just the duty to vote, but to cast an informed vote; and the emotion in

question would not be felt if one did not also feel that one understood what was at stake in the election.) This is presumably why public-opinion surveys rarely register majorities in the "Don't know" category, even though the empirical data masterfully surveyed by Somin show that most respondents don't, in fact, know enough about nearly any political issue to make an objectively informed judgment. Subjectively, people do not *realize* how ignorant they are, and this is hardly surprising: it is in the very nature of ignorance.[2]

If public ignorance is not rational, what does explain it? An answer can be found in Joseph Schumpeter's *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*. Although Schumpeter most often endorses the rational-ignorance theory (e.g., 1950, 261), he suggests a different and more compelling explanation of political ignorance when he compares political and commercial advertising. Both types of persuasion, he maintains, play both on (rational) ignorance and on the irrationality it feeds; but there is the difference that the tricks of advertising

> have infinitely more scope in the sphere of public affairs than they have in the sphere of private and professional life. The picture of the prettiest girl that ever lived will in the long run prove powerless to maintain the sales of a bad cigarette. There is no equally effective safeguard in the case of political decisions. Many decisions of fateful importance are of a nature that makes it impossible for the public to experiment with them at its leisure and at moderate cost. Even if that is possible, however, judgment is as a rule not so easy to arrive at as it is in the case of a cigarette, because *effects are less easy to interpret.* (Ibid., 263, emphasis added)

The emphasized passage breaks loose from the rational-choice preoccupation with the *motivation* to acquire political information. Here Schumpeter concedes, if only for the sake of argument, what does in fact seem to be true: that many people who are *highly* motivated to acquire political information—not just voters, but ideologues—and who *think* that the available information is equivalent to experimental data are, nonetheless, unable to acquire enough information to judge the wisdom of public decisions as adequately as they can judge the wisdom of private ones. The reason is the lack of *clearly interpretable* "feedback" from public decisions. If a policy to enhance national defense is enacted and military preparedness declines—itself a matter nobody can directly perceive—is the new policy at fault, or might preparedness have declined even more without it? If unemployment

falls (again, an intangible in the aggregate), is the president responsible, or the chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, or some exogenous factor? These are questions that even scholars who devote their lifetimes to studying them disagree about. In contrast, when one buys a bad cigarette, one tastes one's mistake immediately; and so it is with many other private decisions. While people are fallible in everything they do, so that their private decisions are, obviously, very often bad ones; and while private decisions often do not have the immediate consequences that serve as the most effective feedback (consider the decision to smoke cigarettes in the first place, which may impair one's health, but only far down the road; or the decision about whom to marry); it is still highly plausible that public decisions are much less likely to provide adequate feedback than private ones. Ignorance is, no doubt, pervasive; but it is often more remediable at the private than at the public level, since negative feedback allows one to notice precisely what is missed by masses and elites alike: that their decision *was*, in fact, ignorant.

In the absence of clear feedback, adequately informed political decisions would require unattainable levels of theoretical and empirical knowledge. It is as if one tried to decide which cigarette to buy by analyzing the chemical composition of each brand's blend of tobacco—or by relying on the testimony of experts. But in politics, how does one know which experts to trust, without being, oneself, an expert? This is where ideology or some other heuristic must enter, no matter how conscientious the decision maker tries to be.

In one sense this line of reasoning might suggest that Somin's solution is right, but for the wrong reason. Perhaps the role of government should be shrunk, not because the remaining decisions will be more informed—there will still be as little direct feedback about defense preparedness when it is one of a few items on the public agenda as when it is one of many—but because the decisions taken off the agenda are likely to be more informed by perceivable feedback when they are "privatized." Although James Q. Wilson dismisses the importance of public ignorance, there is much in his discussion of the rationality of politics that is consistent with this possibility. One must proceed in this direction with caution, however: ignorance is not the only threat to the good. It may be that, on balance, other considerations, such as the power inequalities that follow from depoliticization, would undermine such goods as happiness more than does the ignorance characteristic of democratic decision procedures.

On the other hand, Rogan Kersh suggests that political ignorance not only leads to demands for public "action" to solve problems that may not exist, but to dissatisfaction with democratic decision procedures themselves because of their conflictual nature (which stems from the role ideology necessarily plays in them). An instrumentalist cannot consider this outcome to be inherently undesirable, but a *democratic* instrumentalist might: she would only support democratic procedures in the first place if they seemed likely to produce good results. The democratic instrumentalist must therefore distinguish between a highly politicized democracy, in which many items are on the political agenda, and a democratic society, in which *whatever* items are on the political agenda are decided democratically. While there are cogent instrumentalist arguments for politicization as well as against it, there are separate instrumentalist arguments for democracy that do not entail that everything should be decided democratically. One might follow Karl Popper, for example, in favoring democracy as the best corrective for public policies that are so disastrous that they *do* create discernible negative feedback (see Eidlin 1996). Even though the electorate may not be able to figure out what went wrong or which alternative policies will do better, democracy at least allows the people to throw out the ruling elite on the chance that it is, in fact, responsible for awful conditions, and *in extremis*, this power can be valuable.

Popper's may be a strong argument for subjecting political decisions to democratic processes, but it does not necessarily indicate that all decisions should be made politically, since it may be found that a better way to ensure against disaster in some area is to "privatize" it. Although a great deal of evidence would have to be assembled before we conclude that it would be wise, on such grounds, radically to restrict the range of matters subject to democratic decision, Kersh's argument must make one wonder if a society in which democratic procedures have broad scope because little is privatized may end up undermining what is most valuable about those procedures.

NOTES

1. This is an ideal typology; space does not allow a discussion of where contemporary democratic theories should be placed, beyond observing that the version of "deliberative democracy" advanced by Amy Gutmann and Dennis

Thompson (1996) belongs in the liberal-voluntarist camp because it is designed to constrain democracy to respect people's equal freedoms, while that proposed by James Fishkin (1991), which appears to be instrumentalist because it values informed decisions, collapses into voluntarism because it leaves decisions in the hands of the majority even if informed decisions are not forthcoming. Somin, Hoffman, and Kuran disscuss deliberative democracy at greater length in these pages.

2. Nor will it do to attribute the information acquisition that does take place to the entertainment value of politics, as Somin does, since for the most part, politics as a spectacle seems to alienate people; it is politics as a means to one's ends (whether these ends are selfish or "sociotropic") that draws people into the spectacle, even though only a very small minority of those drawn in have real (as opposed to perceived) power to advance their ends by participating in, and hence becoming informed about, politics. Apart from those few politics junkies for whom it is a hobby, the main entertainment value of politics lies in being engaged by what seem to be important matters to whose resolution one is, as a citizen, a potential contributor.

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