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# masters of political science

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# Introduction

*Donatella Campus and Gianfranco Pasquino*

## THE SELECTION

For a while now, political science as a discipline has been big enough (in terms of the number of academics) and analytically mature enough to justify reflections on and reviews of its achievements. In fact, there is no lack of general handbooks, dictionaries and ‘state of the art’ assessments (as well as ‘reflective’ journals such as the ECPR’s own *European Political Science*), which are useful in helping us to understand and evaluate where we currently are and where we might still need to go. The focus of these texts, however, is on particular concepts, themes, research areas, institutions or behaviour (see, for example, Panebianco 1989; Goodin and Klingemann 1996; Pasquino 2001; *Comparative Political Studies*, Special Issue, 2000). What they rarely do is indulge in a critical reflection on the political scientists themselves, especially those who are commonly accepted as having made the most significant contributions to the growth of their discipline. Two exceptions to this are Daalder (1997) and Munck and Snyder (2007). The first consists of a series of accounts by key comparative political scientists concerning their professional development and the research they have undertaken. The second is a series of interviews by the Editors with key political scientists concerning their experiences. This book, in its focus, differs from both of these and therefore, in our view, fills an important gap in the growing reflective literature on the political science discipline: it consists of a series of ‘objective’ profiles of the ‘Masters of Political Science’, written by political scientists who have read and studied their work and who are therefore in a position to evaluate the nature of their contributions.

Of course, this immediately begs the question, what makes a ‘Master’. For Norberto Bobbio (1981: 215–16) a ‘classic author’ is one to whom three specific achievements may be attributed:

- a) he is considered as the one and only authentic interpreter of his times and his works are used as an indispensable tool for understanding them;
- b) he is always contemporary, so that each age and generation feels the need to read and re-read his works and to give them fresh interpretation;
- c) he has constructed model theories which are used over and over again

to understand reality, even when this differs from the reality in which his theories were derived and applied and with time these models have become actual mind-sets.

Bobbio's definition was formulated with a classic political scientist in mind about whom there can be no doubts: Max Weber. In this sense, a classic political scientist is different from a classic political science text, even if the production of the latter is normally essential to being considered the former. Inevitably, Bobbio's definition should be treated with caution, at least in relation to the authors chosen in this volume, simply because, for many, it may be too early to tell whether they are or will become 'classics' – even though Downs, at least, whose path-breaking book was published in 1957, could aspire to this title.

Yet, whether or not 'classics', we would be bold enough to assert that they are 'Masters'. The ten political scientists whose contributions are presented and analysed in this volume offer an overall vision of what contemporary political science has been and is today, and it is a vision that is broad, articulated and pluralistic with regard to both their approach and analytical fields. Whether or not they are classics, the great thinkers whose analyses and contributions are discussed in the various chapters that follow have been chosen to represent the discipline as a whole, with its various themes and its variations through geographical location, national schools and perspectives. In addition, our selection is designed to represent both American scholars and different European nations.

Introducing these criteria suggests a less scientific approach to our final choice than might be expected, but our defence would be that many could be considered as potentially crossing the Masters' threshold, and that a representative sample of the discipline is therefore important. Indeed, we should, at this point, refer to the origins of this project, which are, for the most part, papers presented at a conference held in the Faculty of Political Science at Bologna University on 5–6 June 2003, a selection of which were subsequently published in a special issue of the journal *Rivista italiana di scienza politica* (3/2003), with the original choice being partly influenced by whether or not authors' works were easily accessible to Italian readers (hence the special issue containing only those papers about non-Italians). Understandably, therefore, in that collection there were good reasons (besides those of space) not to include some authors who might nevertheless stake a claim to Masters' status, for example: Raymond Aron, Gabriel Almond, Norberto Bobbio, Philip Converse, Karl Deutsch, Maurice Duverger, Carl Friedrich, Stanley Hoffman, Harold Lasswell, Paul Lazarsfeld, Theodore J. Lowi, William Riker, Stein Rokkan, Giovanni Sartori, Herbert Simon, and so on.

For these reasons, at the same time as expanding the selection in this volume by including a chapter on Giovanni Sartori (whose exclusion from the original Italian project was due to the wide availability of his works in Italian and critical reflections on that work e.g. Pasquino 2005a), we have already embarked on a second volume of Masters to emphasise that the choices in the first volume are not exhaustive (and we have not, as yet, excluded the possibility of a third). However, it is important to convey the ECPR's gratitude and acknowledgement to the Italian

political scientists and the *Rivista italiana di scienza politica* for the originality of the idea, its completion in Italian and for permitting the production of revised versions of the original chapters (since most were produced in English) as well as revised versions of translated chapters.<sup>1</sup>

For the ECPR, converting this project into English and expanding its scope was an attractive proposition because it dovetailed closely both with its existing 'Classics' book series (which aims to republish political science classic texts which have gone out of print), and with the mission of one of its journals, *European Political Science*. Indeed, the highest downloaded article by far in the history of that journal is Pasquino (2005b), which the author has updated and revised to include in this volume.

The ECPR Academic Director Martin Bull thoroughly checked and edited the English translation. We take the opportunity to express our grateful acknowledgement of his indispensable and extremely generous advice and support. We also want warmly to thank Maria Bucalo for her precious secretarial assistance.

## THE CONTRIBUTIONS

This introduction is not intended to summarise or reproduce what the authors of the various chapters argue concerning their 'Masters'. Rather, it aims to locate the great thinkers within the broader framework of 20th century political science, viewing their contributions through the prism of a more general evaluation of the development of our discipline. To do so, it is useful to start from a particularly polarised debate that occurred in the world's largest political science association, the American Political Science Association (APSA, with 16,000 members) in 2001–02, although to some extent it was simply a resurgence of an old debate in a new form. The debate focused on APSA's *American Political Science Review* (APSR), and the quality, representativeness and importance of the articles published in the journal. A number of leading American political scientists sent an open letter to the journal, denouncing the alleged bias in the selection of the articles for publication towards those characterised by mathematical formalism and which were frequently obscure and of limited interest and usually made use of a single 'theory' of political science. The Editor's reply was defensive, arguing that no selection bias existed in relation to any particular theory, perspective, approach or method, and that the problem lay in the lack of supply of other articles: respected scholars preferred either to publish books or send their articles to other journals. This identification of the problem in terms of supply highlighted the limited perspective, relevance and importance of many, if not most, articles in the APSR, and the consequence was the birth of a new journal, *Perspectives*, which, since 2003, has come out three times a year and which offers space to articles which are not highly formalised but are usually more broadly conceived and give greater importance to significant political phenomena. This book is published

in the same spirit, identifying precisely those authors whose careers have been characterised by efforts to go beyond the narrow confines of single areas of the discipline and grasp the ‘big picture’.

As a consequence, the chapters in this book give a highly diversified, pluralistic and articulated image of political science in the twentieth century. Indeed, the plurality of analytical, methodological, and theoretical perspectives has been one of the strong points of research, knowledge acquisition, development and reflection in political science (see Panebianco 1989). The Masters presented in this book are certainly representative of this pluralism. Some have drawn up original theories themselves, such as David Easton on the political system and Anthony Downs on rational choice. Others have provided high-level interpretations of existing theories, refining and decisively systematising them, such as Robert Dahl on polyarchal democracy and Hans Morgenthau on realism in international relations. Highly original too was the broad spectrum of research carried out by Sidney Verba on comparative political participation. The other scholars share, to a greater (e.g. Samuel Finer) or lesser (e.g. Juan Linz) extent an important characteristic: they have studied a plurality of political phenomena while keeping their eye on one phenomenon in particular. Linz is above all interested in understanding and explaining the dynamics of political regimes (authoritarian, totalitarian, democratic, sultanistic) and institutions, with a clear cut distinction between presidential and parliamentary governments, and there is no doubt that his work has left an analytical mark that cannot be ignored. Lipset’s core concerns are the requirements or needs of democracy and the functioning of democracies in practice, first and foremost that of the US. Huntington’s most important contributions regard the role of the military, modes of development, the downfall of democracies (even ‘consolidated’ democracies), and systems of religious beliefs and the part they play at an international level (with the potential for a ‘clash of civilisations’). Finally, Wildavsky is an eclectic political scientist *par excellence*, focusing on a plurality of themes ranging from the American presidential elections to the role of political culture and, in possibly his most valuable and long-lasting contribution, public policy analysis.

If these Masters represent, above all else, the defining characteristic of the development of political science (a pluralism of analytical, methodological and theoretical perspectives) the question arises as to whether this plurality has been a positive feature, enriching our knowledge, or whether, by contrast, it has wasted human resources and hindered the growth of our knowledge. Have we, in fact, learned a little about lots of things when we would have been in the position (and are today, some critics would argue) of focusing our resources on developing a single theory, that of rational choice. Evidently, the corollary of that argument (which is especially strong in contemporary American political science but not only there), is that it would be better to rationalise, constrain or simply put aside a pluralism of perspectives, with the goal of providing real scientific value to the discipline through the theory of rational choice (the variations of which will not be dealt with here).<sup>2</sup>

Leaving aside any judgment on the actual quality, originality and importance of the works of rational choice theories, it is surely the case that any attempt to rationalise political science through the elimination of other analytical perspectives is destined to fail. Furthermore, even if it were achievable it would result in a hefty reduction in the breadth and depth of themes analysed, leaving the discipline all the poorer. Indeed, rational choice theory has yet to demonstrate that it is capable of making up for the shortcomings in political science or interacting better with other disciplinary or sub-disciplinary fields, and many critics believe it never will. It could be argued that in some areas it still seems unable to offer an original or convincing contribution to the field.

One of the basic methods, if not objectives, of scientific research, is to exploit and build on the cumulative effect of previous findings. This, of course, is one of the principal means through which knowledge grows. Research is carried out starting from what we already know, and we then attempt to test and verify the generalisations and theories that exist with the aim of refining and revising hypotheses and using data in order either to confirm or undermine theories found in the existing literature. Giorgio Freddi, in his analysis of Wildavsky's work, is right, therefore, to emphasise the importance of the accumulation of knowledge, but it can equally be applied to the other Masters discussed in this volume, all of whom could be said to have followed a similar path and one which eventually led them into formulating original 'non-conformist' hypotheses, generalisations and theories which are still worthy of attention today. Yet, it might be questioned to what extent this tradition or approach is any longer accepted as valid in political science. Indeed, with regard to both research and theorisation it could be argued that a dangerous break in this tradition has occurred. Almond (1999b), in raising the problem, spoke of the existence of 'separate tables' within American political science, with dinner guests not speaking to each other. Worse, he suggested that there existed 'sects' of disciples who, rather than comparing their ideas amongst themselves, made reference only to rational choice theory and to those authors bent on sweeping away the past without a sufficient knowledge or understanding of what went before (this being perhaps the very reason why they wish to do so). Without going into the merits of Almond's specific criticism of group analysis (Almond 1990c), it should be noted that not only does the problem still exist but has probably got worse in the period since Almond's first observations. Two examples will suffice.

The first concerns themes dear to both Huntington and Lipset: the conditions of democracy and political development (for the necessary references see the chapters on the two authors in this volume). Does it not seem strange (and is surely open to criticism) that the mass of studies on democratisation make little or no reference to political development? Naturally, Huntington retains a central position in both fields and his analysis proceeds accordingly. Too many authors, however, and the 'democratisers' especially, seem to have little idea of the research that went before nor of the construction of concepts in political development – or at least they appear to be unable to use and integrate them into their theoretical models (if

indeed there are any). The distance between two collections of studies (Bunce 2000; Hagopian 2000) is emblematic. Taken on their own, each is enlightening and comprehensive, but the lack of any inter-connection between the two is indicative of something fundamentally wrong in political science regarding the accumulation of knowledge.

The second example concerns one of the longstanding unresolved problems of rational choice theory (referring to the founding premises of the theory itself): the paradox of the vote. Why should individuals vote if, on the basis of a rational calculation, voting is costly as regards time, energy and even money, and offers no certainty of obtaining the desired ends? Most rational choice theoreticians do not attempt to explain this paradox, or, if they do, it is through ‘bending’ the premises of their theory. Gary Cox (1997), by contrast, not only gives a convincing explanation of the paradox of the vote, but does it by specific reference to three great scholars (Maurice Duverger, Colin Leys and Giovanni Sartori) in order to obtain ‘a fertile combination of traditions’ (Cox 1997: 12). The analysis he produces is not only much richer and more convincing than those of other exponents of rational choice, but also offers an admirable example of the accumulative impact of research, assumptions and theories.

In all likelihood it is only through reference to the accumulative process of knowledge that it becomes possible to apply the fundamental principle of control of different assumptions and theories in order to verify or refute them. Indeed, how could it be possible to test, revise, improve or even refute a theory without referring explicitly to those that already exist? Moreover, how could we claim originality and greater explicative power for our own assumptions and theories without an awareness of the research of authors preceding us and the ability to draw close comparisons? As Karl Popper (1969: 248) wrote, ‘we look for theories which, however fallible, progress beyond their predecessors’. In short, in order to move on from existing theories it is necessary to know those theories well in the first place.

Obviously, the challenging or refuting of existing theories is not a sufficient condition for progress in knowledge to occur. Existing theories which have been undermined may not yet be ready to be replaced by new theories, which must, in any case, undergo a similar process of testing. It may even be that the search to exploit the accumulative quality of knowledge, which is indispensable to challenging existing theories, may create conditions that, in fact, limit progress, acting as a form of strait-jacket. The risk is that we may be left with theories that are weakened but not yet replaced on the one hand, but with only small, unsatisfactory steps made in terms of their revision, on the other. Thomas Kuhn (1970), while masterfully codifying what was already generally known, at the same time made an important contribution to our understanding of the process of accumulation of knowledge, explaining how progress may be triggered by ‘paradigm shifts’:

Discovery commences with the awareness of anomaly, i.e., with the recognition that nature has somehow violated the paradigm-induced

expectations that govern normal science. It then continues with a more or less extended exploration of the area of anomaly. And it closes only when the paradigm theory has been adjusted so that the anomalous has become the expected. Assimilating a new sort of fact demands a more than additive adjustment of theory. (1970: 52–3).

Some of the Masters examined in this book have produced paradigm shifts, and we will cite here only three examples which are of particular importance. The first (chronologically speaking) was that of Juan Linz when in 1964 he formulated his famous (and as yet unsurpassed), definition of an authoritarian regime, which clearly separated it from that of its totalitarian counterpart. The second was that of Samuel Huntington whose 1965 work tackled the concept of political decadence in the analysis of changes in ‘developing’ countries, which until then had been one-sided, teleological and overly optimistic. The third concerns the redirection of research on and theorisation of political participation by Sidney Verba in 1995, who revealed the inadequacy of socio-economic status to explain levels of participation in the political process and proposed a convincing replacement in the form of ‘civic voluntarism’.

#### ‘ON THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS’

The temptation to conclude this Introduction by using an expression that has become axiomatic, if not proverbial (as well as being the title of a book by the well-known sociologist, Robert Merton 1991) is too strong: to produce good science (of which political science is no exception), one needs to climb ‘on the shoulders of giants’, those scholars who have produced studies that have notably advanced our knowledge of substance, methodology and theory. For a better view of the nature of democracy, its workings and transformation, it is necessary to climb onto the shoulders of Dahl and Lipset, but also onto those of Downs (who provides us with a good view of the potential of rational choice theory). From Easton’s shoulders we observe the systemic theory of politics, from Finer’s the notion of government in all its forms. To capture the differences between authoritarian and totalitarian regimes it is essential to jump onto Linz’s shoulders. Without standing on Verba’s shoulders, we would be unable to understand what motivates political participation. And the vistas from the shoulders of Morgenthau on the one hand and Wildavsky on the other are essential to anyone embarking on the study of either realism in international relations or public policy.

Yet, the task of climbing onto the shoulders of these giants should not be underestimated. It requires reading, studying, assimilating, mastering and evaluating their writings. The alternative, however, is stark: staying on the ground, unable to see the bigger picture (or pictures) of political science, and basing one’s vision only on the exchange of ideas with members of one’s own narrow tribe or sect. The consequences of completing that task are clear for the scholars who

manage it and for the growth of the discipline. In addition, those who manage the struggle and are afforded the view realise not only how poorer political science would have been without their contributions, but also that, while we might not be able to define a ‘Master’ in a scientifically rigorous manner, we know when we’re standing on one’s shoulders.

### Notes

- 1 Thanks are also due to the Fondazione della Cassa di Risparmio in Bologna (and especially its president, Fabio Roversi Monaco), for the generous funding which made it possible to produce the original Italian version.
- 2 For a comprehensive outline of the variations in rational choice see Giannetti (2003). The most up-to-date and sophisticated contribution is probably Tsebelis (2002). For early and astute critical observations argued in reference to Down’s seminal text see Almond (1990a).

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chapter  
one

Robert Dahl: The Democratic  
Polyarchy

*Domenico Fisichella*

ANALYSIS OF THE CONDITIONS

Anyone looking back over the intellectual itinerary of Robert A. Dahl is struck by the constant reappearance of two themes that are present throughout the entire production of this American political scientist. The first theme inspires much of his subject matter. ‘The First Problem of Politics – how citizens can keep their rulers from becoming tyrants’ is pronounced by Dahl in *Politics, Economics and Welfare*, which was written with Charles E. Lindblom (Dahl and Lindblom 1953: 273). This statement, thanks to the lofty tone imparted by the use of capitals and the syntactical rhythm reminiscent of that of ancient pronouncements, would seem even from a stylistic point of view, to descend directly from the problems as posed in classical political thinking. The second theme is found in his intention to place the theories he develops within the context of a scientific investigation of advanced hypotheses. In fact, at the methodological level, Dahl wishes rigidly to interpret the requirements of analysis in modern methodological criticism. The weaving together of the two themes – the classical inspiration and the attempt at an advanced method – gives rise to a singular combination, of which we will try to examine certain fundamental elements.

The volume produced by Dahl and Lindblom is one of the first systematic attempts of the two disciplines of political science and economics to work together (an approach repeated many times in Dahl’s later production) and of the reciprocal use of interpretive models created within the two sectors. Published in 1953, this book appeared after *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* by Schumpeter, which came out in 1942, but preceded Anthony Downs’ *The Economic Theory of Democracy*, by four years.

The subject of the book is the development of a new concept of ‘plan’, assuming the definition of plan to be ‘a rationally calculated action to achieve a goal’, (1953: xx) and therefore taking for granted that an economic policy based on a plan can be enacted not only in a collective logic but also within a market economy. What is important is to verify the prerequisites for rational social action, on the one

hand postulating a group of social ends, and on the other examining a group of social processes, which are instrumental (or *means*) for the furtherance of the ends advanced. The rationality of the action is dependent on the suitability of the means to the ends (the *rational calculation of the means*), and the more the ends can be 'maximized' the more the means will be able to ensure the achievement of the ends themselves.

There are essentially two problems that emerge from such a stance. First, there is a problem of incompatibility – beyond empirically ascertainable limits – between the ends of social action. Let us look at the political systems of the Western area. The two authors list seven fundamental ends as being typical of the area: freedom, rationality, democracy, subjective equality, security, progress, appropriate inclusion (1953: 25). Each of these represents a 'value' for western political culture, which aspires towards their increase. Now, the observation is that the achievement of all these goals simultaneously gives rise to problems that are irresolvable both as regards structural balances and also the availability of the means themselves. Beyond certain limits for example, the maximization of rationality becomes contradictory to the goal of maximizing equality. The same is true for freedom and security, and so on.

The second problem arises from the consideration that not all the social processes hypothesised as means for the achievement of the ends are available and can be used to the same extent for all the ends. The social processes appropriate to the maximization of the value of rationality are not necessarily 'good' as instruments for the fulfilment of the values of freedom or equality. Not only this. Given that the existence of each social process requires certain essential conditions, this entails that not all the means are available and present at the same time (and even less so in high concentrations) as in no social context do the conditions exist for the simultaneous flourishing of a large number of means. From this assumption it follows that – compared to the variety of ends – in each given situation there would tend to be a scarcity of means.

To summarize: a) the ends of social action are manifold, and beyond certain levels of increase, contradictory; b) the means, on the other hand, are scarce and not all appropriate to all of the ends. This being the *status quaestionis*, how is the scientific discussion on politics defined within the perspective of the two authors? It is defined as *the analysis of the conditions*. More precisely, this is the analysis of the conditions for the selection of the values or the ends, which do not become 'maximized' only on the basis of the criteria of which is preferable, but rather on the basis of the criteria of availability of the means. And, it is also the analysis of the conditions that favour certain means rather than others.

But what are the means of social action? Dahl and Lindblom distinguish between four fundamental social processes. The first is the price system. The second is the control by leaders, or the hierarchy. The third is the control among leaders, which takes the form of negotiating or bargaining. The fourth, lastly, is the control of the leaders from above, which is termed 'polyarchy'. At this point the problem that was initially considered in terms of economic policy becomes a

subject matter for political scientists. In fact, if preventing rulers from becoming tyrants is the fundamental problem of politics, it is the polyarchy which represents the concrete solution (1953: 275).

The concept of polyarchy is essential for an understanding of the intellectual history of Robert Dahl, and I will discuss the word itself later on. The word crops up in all the works of the American scholar, though not always with exactly the same connotations, and there is no doubt that in the work co-authored with Lindblom – who was above all an economist – the chapters dedicated to the expansion of the concept can be traced back to Dahl. The first definition that Dahl gives us of the notion of a polyarchy, which is to a certain extent surprising, is a definition of what it is not, and which is gleaned from the statement that ‘Polyarchy, not democracy, is the actual solution to the First Problem of Politics’ (1953: 275). To start with, therefore, polyarchy is not democracy. Moreover, and this is an equally significant aspect, democracy does not represent an adequate solution to the problem of preventing rulers from becoming tyrants, given that the control of the leaders is a specific function of the polyarchal process.

The relationship between democracy and polyarchy will be one of the main themes in a later book by Dahl, *A Preface to Democratic Theory* (published in 1956), in which not only is the subject considered in greater depth but certain ideas are further defined and a number of themes are corrected. Meanwhile, I will attempt to reconstruct the analysis of the conditions that make the existence of a polyarchy possible, as developed in the book *Politics, Economics and Welfare*.

Nowadays, as Dahl states, in both small groups and complex organisations two fundamental tendencies are at work. The first is the push towards inequality of control, or towards unilateral control: a trend that Michels evoked in relation to socialist parties, when he talked about ‘the iron law of oligarchy.’ However, there is also a second tendency in which organisms do not operate in an exclusive form through the unilateral use of command and the manipulation of the base, but create certain relationships of reciprocity. The formula that Dahl proposes in this latter case is a ‘law that counterbalances reciprocity’. In other words, while the law of oligarchy emphasises the push towards inequality, the law of reciprocity emphasises the trend towards the counterbalancing of inequalities.<sup>1</sup> When this latter trend becomes strong and empowering enough, then according to Dahl, an organisation takes on the characteristics of a polyarchy.

Naturally, in order for the trend to reciprocity to be able to contrast and rebalance the trend towards inequality<sup>2</sup> certain conditions are necessary. Dahl sums them up in two points: 1) the leaders must win power by competing for the support of non-leaders: 2) the non-leaders must be able to transfer their support from the leaders in power to their rivals. ‘Given these two conditions, leaders will be highly responsive to the preferences of non-leaders or lose their control’, (Dahl and Lindblom (1953: 283)). In other words, these two conditions help to consolidate the reciprocity of controls and to weaken unilateral control. Returning to the law of oligarchy, ‘the presence of these conditions means that two or more hierarchical organisations can actually contribute to the operation of a polyarchal

organization.’ Political parties, as Michels observed, tend to be oligarchic or, as we would say, hierarchical. ‘But two or more political parties which are competing with one another for the votes of citizens can make a polyarchy’ (1953: 283). It is true, however, that the two key conditions do not arise within an historical vacuum, nor are they merely accidental. Rather, they presuppose a whole series of other preconditions whose interdependence and interaction create the terrain in which a process of polyarchy can exist and grow.

For a start, ‘a polyarchy requires social indoctrination and habituation in the process and the desirability of democracy’ (1953: 287). While polyarchy is not the same as democracy, for it to operate it is nevertheless necessary that both leaders and common citizens perceive democracy as a value. This is, then, a peculiarity of the relationship between polyarchy and democracy: while it is true that democracy as a goal of social action is conditioned by the availability of the means or the social processes, it is also true that democracy, as a value in itself, conditions the actual working of the polyarchal social process. Effectively, in the complex game of political partners, means and ends would appear to be mutually conditioning and conditioned.

The second precondition emphasises the need for a basic consensus as regards the ‘rules of the game’, concerning the fundamental issues and the methods that facilitate peaceful competition and allow citizens freely to transfer their votes from the governing leaders to the opposition (1953: 294). The logic of this second condition is that the models of citizen orientation as regards the political process (the ‘political culture’ as Gabriel Almond and his followers would put it) must have an area, or a level, of generalised homogeneity, without which dissent will involve not only those in power and their actions, but would also risk involving the foundations of the political regime itself, thus endangering the very institutions that could resolve conflicts peacefully.

The other four preconditions set out by Dahl can be quickly summarised: a considerable degree of social pluralism, that is to say a variety of social organisations each of which has a wide measure of independence; a relatively high degree of political activity and popular participation; the inability to win elections as the main obstacle to the access of positions to political power; and the presupposition of a society that has an appreciable level of psychological security, resulting from limited differences in wealth and income, and perhaps from widespread education (1953: 302–19).

This rapid summary is because – apart from the aspects of substantial theory – I am interested at this point in outlining Dahl’s argumentative procedure and the logical syntax as they take form in this early work. Two essential problems, however, remain open: the issue of the relationship between democracy and polyarchy, which has certain ambivalent aspects; and the question of measuring techniques, which are of utmost importance in a discussion that is rich in expressions such as ‘considerable degree’, ‘appreciable level’, ‘relatively high rate’, and which in general is set out in terms of maximization and of appropriateness/adequacy of the means to the ends.

## THREE CONCEPTIONS

As mentioned earlier, Dahl deals in depth with the relationship between democracy and polyarchy, and sets out his point of view in the book *A Preface to Democratic Theory*. The author distances himself from the idea of a single theory of democracy, but talks rather of ‘democratic theories’ (Dahl 1967: 1). One could make a long list of possible democratic theories, and Dahl himself puts forward some proposals. However, his analysis is limited to a few representative types of democratic theory: in particular to Madisonian democracy<sup>3</sup>, populist democracy and polyarchal democracy. It should be noted that Dahl thus abandons the, albeit ambiguous, contraposition between democracy and polyarchy that had been outlined in the book co-authored with Lindblom. In this volume the idea of polyarchy is clearly a theory of democracy.

One of the central preoccupations of the Madisonian concept of democracy<sup>4</sup> is the establishment and conservation of a ‘non-tyrannical republic’. But what is tyranny? Dahl’s interpretation of Madison’s vision paints tyranny as any serious violation of a natural right, and this is engendered when all powers – legislative, executive and judiciary – are concentrated in the same hands, and, as such, an aggregation involves the elimination of those external controls that alone guarantee full respect of individual rights. As Alexander Hamilton said so succinctly, ‘give all power to many and they will oppress the few: give all the power to few and they will oppress the many’ (Dahl 1967: 7). From such a perspective, at least two conditions are necessary to guarantee the existence of a republic that is not tyrannical: that the concentration of all the power in the same hands is avoided at all costs<sup>5</sup>; and that those factions are controlled so that they are unable to operate successfully against the rights of citizens or the interests of the community.<sup>6</sup>

According to Dahl, the means which Madisonian democracy foresees for the fulfilment of such conditions are the organisation and the functioning of a system of constitutional checks and balances, and the division of powers. However, this is the point of the doctrine most open to criticism. Actually, the Madisonian concept boils down to a fundamental political mechanism, that of reciprocal control among leaders (1967: 21). The reason is easy to explain: in its essence, Madisonian democracy does not forget its origins as a political system aimed at protecting the ‘natural rights of the well-born and the few’ (1967: 83). In this sense, the accent is placed above all on the rules of the constitutional game, since in a republic of ‘the well-born and the few’, what counts is the action of these minorities and of the mutual checks, which come down to – as *Politics, Economics and Welfare* shows us – a process of bargaining. Once the process of bargaining and the mutual control between minorities has been sorted out, one is more than half way there.

Dahl puts forward three reservations about this concept. First, it does not state that the mutual control between leaders, considered sufficient to avoid tyranny, requires that a separation of powers be written into the constitution. Second, it does not fully weigh the significance of the psychological reality that comes into play with checks on behaviour. Third, and most importantly, the Madisonian