One of the most difficult issues to be resolved in the study of democratic theory is the problem of false consciousness. Consider a hypothetical situation. In an area facing declining employment, the leading corporation demands from the city council a relaxation of all laws governing air and water pollution. Members of the local union, uncertain about their economic future, lobby on behalf of the proposed legislation. Given that the union members are the consumers of the air and water that will, by their actions, endanger the health and safety of their families, is their support for the relaxation in their "interest"?
There are two general ways to answer the above question, neither, I wish to argue, satisfactory. One can resolve the issue simply by claiming that every action taken by citizens must be understood exactly as it is posed. Since the final judge of "interest" must be those who articulate it, the demand for a relaxation of pollution control laws cannot conceivably be "false", for any assertion that it is substitutes, in elitist fashion, the judgement of the observer over that of the observed. While this position has the virtue of democracy, it is a democracy without judgement, making, in my opinion, the unwarranted assumption that a gap between the outward indication of a desire and an inward need never exists. So long as one assumes that there can be a distinction between a sentiment and its public articulation, then the problem for the social scientist is to discover why and how the distinction exists, not to define the problem away in pseudo-populist style.

From radical and Marxist perspectives, a standard of working class expectations is established, from which any deviation is labelled "false". In the above example, the expected form of action would be working class solidarity in the face of corporate pressure. Any response less than that indicates a failure of perception, an inability to ascertain the correct alternative, as if one were taking a multiple choice exam. While such a position has the advantage of recognizing that the articulated position of an individual or a group need not correspond to a private need, the obvious limitation is the inability to establish exactly what a correct response is. In a society where the labour market determines how one lives one's life, it is a perfectly rational response to choose a job over the environment, if that is the only choice one has.

I have listened to debates over the problem of false consciousness endlessly, and have long wondered whether or not the problem can be treated more satisfactorily. In this paper I will suggest that the debate has generally been over the meaning of the adjective "false", with conservatives denying that any articulated interest can be considered untrue, and radicals claiming that most of them must be. The real problem, I will contend, lies in the meaning of the noun "consciousness", for the use of this term presupposes a relationship between cognitive processes and political action that may not hold.
In the hypothetical example I have been using, both sides to the debate agree that there is a linkage between the articulation of an opinion and particular public policies, differing as to whether the link is a direct one or not. For both sides, in other words, the problem of what is to be represented is assumed—the state, in the form of public policy, represents, adequately in some cases, inadequately in others, the ideas of the constituent groups that compose the state. Public life therefore becomes a place in which competing conceptions of the public good are fought out. But suppose that such an assumption cannot be held; that for at least some of the parties to a conflict over public policy, political action is not concerned with the representation of an idea or set of ideas, but instead is seen as the venting of deep-seated frustrations, the reassertion of symbolic values, or the desire to inflict ritualistic punishment on others. In this case, the public space becomes the arena not for the representation of consciousness but, in the extreme case, the articulation of the unconscious. The problem, in other words, is to examine what people expect from the political process before we can understand whether the political process represents those expectations fairly.

To return to my example one last time, the thorny issue involved for the problem of representation is to interpret the meaning of the demand for the suspension of pollution laws to those who made it. If in voting to protect their jobs, as they saw it, the members of this union were indicating in symbolic language their desire to isolate themselves from the effects of labour market insecurity, their actions possessed an anti-corporate "meaning", even while being perfectly in line with corporate "interests". To translate their vote into a mandate for corporate freedom therefore would be inexact at best, dishonest at worst. The issue in this case would be that the structure of the choice involved did not allow for an authentic expression of what must be, for all those concerned, highly complex feelings. Given a certain level of inauthenticity in the structure of the choices presented to the public, in other words, one must increasingly examine the underlying cluster of motives and meanings involved in a political attitude before judging whether that attitude is a true or false reflection of a particular consciousness.

Inauthenticity, I will argue, has become an essential component of democratic politics. To prove this point beyond doubt
would require an excursion into the philosophy of human needs, for only if one can establish that one set of needs is authentic compared to another can a politics of inauthenticity be discussed. Since a good deal of writing has been devoted to this question, and since my main concern in this paper is with politics, I must make assumptions in order to proceed. Two key assumptions are as follows: (1) there exists within every individual a self that seeks to expand its capacities to the fullest, to be, in a word, free; and, (2) self-fulfillment is dependent upon social cooperation organized with the objective of providing for people what they cannot, by their individual efforts, provide for themselves. (Those who refuse to accept these assumptions will, of course, disagree with the analysis that follows).

There are political systems in the world, especially the Soviet Union and its satellites, which negate individual self-fulfillment as a goal and therefore side-step the problem of authenticity entirely. Liberal democracies however, hold out the realization of human freedom as an objective and then, with fairly wide variations from one country to another, find themselves placing limits on the possibility of that realization. A democracy, then, is authentic to the degree that the choices it offers its citizens allow them to realize self-fulfillment through social cooperation. Inauthentic democracy exists when the structure of choices present in an otherwise open political system either does not allow such fulfillment or actively works to negate it.

The problem of inauthenticity shifts the focus in a different way than the problem of false consciousness. In both cases, as critics have no doubt realized, there is an implicit statement of preferred outcomes, the violation of which is seen as problematic. (Frankly, I fail to see how this problem can be avoided if social theory is to have any purpose.) But whereas false consciousness implies that ordinary people have failed to see the truth, inauthenticity, hopefully in more sympathetic fashion, analyzes the truth as a realization problem. Individuals do discover, without much help from philosophers, what their needs are, but the translation of those needs into a political response often becomes difficult. There is, in short, a significant gap between the perceptions that individuals have of their own situation and their ability, given the structure of choices offered by the political system, to translate those perceptions into a man-
date for one policy direction or another. Indeed there are frequently situations where the political mandate expressed runs directly counter to the original motives articulated.

The remaining analysis will concentrate on the United States where, in my opinion, the problem of inauthenticity has increased drastically. Americans in their private lives, as de Tocqueville stressed, tend to be a remarkably authentic people, honest with each other, tolerant and willing to admit complexity. Yet for an authentic people, Americans have developed a strikingly inauthentic politics. Truthful to each other, Americans accept with remarkable ease knowing lies from the mouths of their politicians. People who would go far out of their way to help another individual in trouble support policies that punish and stigmatize those same individuals socially. Peaceful and genuinely abhorent of violence, Americans like politicians who promise them ever more weapons of destruction in the name of security. When discussion and controversy move from the level of personal relationships to abstract questions of power and authority, something snaps in the American political mind. Cliche replaces thought; sentimentality substitutes for reason; standards of judgement disintegrate; corruption, of deed and word, is tolerated; and finally, when the standards of public life become insufferable, a moral crusading spirit arises which is as inauthentic as the cynicism it fights.

Public life in the United States can be understood as a mechanism for the translation of authentic urges into inauthentic responses. Individuals who enter the political process with a fairly clear idea of their values and goals find, when confronted with a bewildering array of promises and dreams, that little in the world of political parties and media-dominated elections allows for the expression of the nuance they feel. Choosing the alternative least reprehensible to them, they come less and less to expect that politics will enable them to express public sentiments. Unable to articulate their public positions, they increasingly use the political system to express their private concerns. (So-called "public opinion polls", as Friedrich Pollack understood some time ago, are misnamed; conducted in individual circumstances, they aggregate private concerns, not public ones, and should be so identified.) By the time the political cycle is complete, one level of inauthenticity piled on top of another yields politicians and policies that, in fundamen-
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tal ways, are at odds with the original motives of those who entered the political process. Students of representation generally examine what comes out at the end of the cycle; the really important issues, however, are resolved during its course.

II: The Origins of Inauthenticity

The singular feature of advanced industrial societies responsible for inauthentic politics is the interpenetration of private and public life in reality, combined with a sharp distinction between these two realms ideologically.

Since the invention of the Greek polis, political theorists have delinated between the realm of the household and that of the state. The former arena, significantly called “economy” in ancient Greece, is responsible for the “low” functions of getting and spending—one achieves a certain self-sufficiency in the household which is the badge of entry into the “high” world of public discussion and debate. Public spaces then, are places where more mundane economic considerations can be put aside for the purpose of resolving matters essential to the survival of the community itself. In a word, the distinctive feature of the household is the pursuit of self interest; the goal of the polis is the achievement of disinterest. The best political system is where rulers achieve the maximum distance from their immediate concerns.

One could compile a seemingly endless list of factors responsible for the decline of Greek conceptions of politics under conditions of late twentieth century life, including size, complexity, bureaucracy, mass society, class, race, ethnicity, war, technology, density, anomie, alienation, and just about every other concept developed by social theorists of radically different political persuasions. Two kinds of states dominate the industrialized world: authoritarian societies, where the achievement of economic growth and national defence is pursued directly by the state, often regardless of cost; and, capitalist democracies, where brokering among large-scale economic units, some form of indirect government planning, and a greater recognition of private areas outside of state purview characterize public life. There are obviously enormous differences between these two conceptions of public life. Economically, capitalism represents a structure of incentives that is often as wasteful and irrational as it is innovative and copied. Politically, democracy
stands for an ideal of human freedom that is often violated in practice, but at least constitutes an ideal against which the behavior of the state can be judged. From the standpoint of the individual, the western alternative has clear advantages.

In many ways however, the twentieth century is not the century of the individual but of the state. The accumulation of state power since World War I has been truly astonishing, culminating not only in explicitly totalitarian and authoritarian states, but in concentrations of economic and political power within liberal democracies that have significantly restricted the arena of human freedom. If we examine industrial society from the point of view of power, certain common features stand out—ones which can be identified by the term "modernity", an awkward term but one which, for lack of an adequate substitute, cannot be avoided. Since my concern here is with the state, I will limit myself to pointing out only some of the major features that have contributed to the modernization of public life. (1) The modern state, as we know from Max Weber, assigns unto itself the ultimate source of authority—its judgement, in the end, is the final judgement. (2) The modern state, whatever the social system in which it is embedded, is a mass state. The differences between democratic and authoritarian states are real, but both legitimate their rule by appealing to public needs and concerns. (3) The modern state is responsible for the protection of the society against its external enemies, meaning that all modern nation-states spend a considerable amount of their resources in one fashion or another preparing for war. (4) All modern states are intimately involved in promotional activities, bending their efforts to the achievement of economic growth. Even the handful of modern states that still cling to outmoded ideologies of laissez-faire are actively involved in promotional concerns, if in hypocritical fashion. (5) Modern states are inevitably welfare states, whether they consider themselves capitalist or socialist. Recent neo-liberal regimes in Great Britain and the United States, by their failure to roll back the welfare state, acknowledge the essentiality of welfare functions for the modern state. (6) States accumulate sufficient power to become, to one degree or another, autonomous from the non-government institutions of modern society. In socialist states, such autonomy is complete, in the sense that private ownership is simply not allowed to
compete with state prerogatives. In capitalist states, there are dual systems of power that vary in relative importance, but in no advanced capitalist society is the state totally dependent on private corporations. (7) As autonomous centers of power, modern states develop elites charged with the maintenance of the existing order. All modern states are police states in the sense that they possess enhanced security forces, engage in covert actions, subsidize or even direct propaganda operations, and attempt to prevent domestic dissent from challenging hegemonic rule. (8) Modern states that have the capacity to expand outside their borders, whether capitalist or socialist, will expand outside their borders. All modern states are imperial in the sense that they would, if they could, seek empire; the limitation on empire is not the lack of desire but the lack of means. (9) No modern state lives by its ideology. All of them possess ideologies, some liberal, some socialist. In every modern state, whatever its ideology, a significant rupture exists between what the state is supposed to do and what the state actually does. (10) Citizens in the modern state experience both more and less democracy than in previous states—more, in the sense that the state engages in activities that rebound to their material advantage; less, in the sense that modern states become administratively and bureaucratically removed from popular control. (11) There has occurred, in all modern states, a deterioration of institutions that mediate between the public realm of state power and the private realm of individual choice. Such intermediate institutions as political parties, interest groups, associations and local governments find themselves pulled within the orbit of the state, though some move closer to the realm of civil society. Maintaining a precarious balance in the middle becomes increasingly difficult. (12) While authority in the modern state is increasingly depersonalized, characterized by legal/rational rules, mass democracy requires periodic efforts to develop a politics of personality and routinized charisma. Governmental elites, in short, are constantly forced to repudiate the legal character of authority in order to rule, but in doing so they undermine their own basis of authority, creating a certain instability, which renders the smooth transmission of authority difficult. (13) To some degree then, all modern states govern against the grain of the expectations of their own citizens. Whatever the process of selection, no elite that comes to power
can carry out the promises it made in order to come to power. The modern state is characterized by a cycle of illusion and disillusion. Elites raise hopes in order to gain access to the state, but must dash hopes in order to maintain their access of the state. A “bunker mentality” comes to characterize the leaders of the modern state as they consider strategies for dealing with their common problem: maintaining their control over those whom, to one degree or another, they must satisfy.

The conditions of modern political life, in short, have come a long way from the Athenian *polis*. Specific features of modernity—including concentrations of national political power, heavy industrialization and the decline of self-sufficient modes of production, population density and concentration, social interdependence and the complexity of the division of labour—have together undermined the localist and disinterested ideals of Enlightenment conceptions of public virtue. Modern states are engaged above all else in aspiring to economic growth and creating systems of national defence. Neither goal can be accomplished by individuals acting alone. Sustaining growth, unlike the accumulation of private wealth, requires direction and planning, whether undertaken by government itself or by private concentrations of power so vast that they become de facto governments. Security at one time may have had a local, sometimes even a voluntary character, but in the modern world it has become the exclusive prerogative of governments, whatever the formal ideology of the social systems within which they exist. The realm of social life that is nonполитicized, existing outside the formal purview of the state, shrinks as modernity intensifies.

Political modernity, then, undermines two specific features of the theory of how the state is supposed to work. On the one hand, national defence obliterates the distinction between public and private, since modern nation-states create military bureaucracies that combine elements of both. On the other hand, there is less space for disinterested public action when economic growth becomes a priority, since concentrated monopolies fuse together their self interest with the general good of all. The most fully modernized state would be one capable of counting every single person in the society—census-taking is a high priority of political modernity—and ascertaining the most rational use of those individuals in the pursuit of economic growth and national defence.
Writing in 1940, Max Horkheimer foresaw the rise of an "authoritarian state" which, whatever its formal ideology, would rationalize, more and more, popular will into administrative power. Since Horkheimer was using the term "authoritarian" in a specifically Weberian sense, while in today's common language the word is defined as the opposite of "democratic", some of the flavour of his argument has been lost. If we use the term "concentrated" state—one that accumulates as much power as it can to rationalize its economy and protect itself against external hostility—then all modern states are concentrated states. Ironically, the self-consciously authoritarian states of the twentieth century have an ideal typical character to them—if one is going to destroy a peasantry and create a militarized and industrialized society, an authoritarian state is the most direct means of so doing. Certainly there are far more authoritarian states in the modern world than democratic ones.

From the point of view of concentrated power then, liberal democracies are the great exceptions—awkward and rather untypical responses to modern pressures. In a fascinating recent essay, Albert Hirschman has traced the process by which society wanders back and forth from disappointment with private goals to dissatisfaction with public action. His rich conclusions however, are based on a presupposition that the line between the private and public sectors is a clear one, an assumption that no longer holds. Modern liberal democracies resemble neither classical liberal societies nor modern authoritarian societies. Classical liberalism elevated the private sector over the public, and asserted what Jurgen Habermas called the "automatic" "self regulating" features of the market. Authoritarian states like the Soviet Union suppress the private sector, and fetishize the public. Modern liberal democracy, unlike both, survives by blending public and private.

In modern liberal democracies, growth and security are achieved through ideologically uncomfortable but practically workable combinations of market incentives and public policies. Guided neither by Adam Smith nor by Sidney Webb, modern liberal democracies avoid a rigid reliance on either the state or the market. No doubt the disappointments with public and private life catalogued by Albert Hirschman are real, but elites learn to live with them, for there are no other options.
This is as true of the pursuit of economic growth as it is for the construction of national security. (Indeed, the United States, the country most antagonistic to the use of the state in economic affairs, is the most tolerant of its role in military matters.) Modern liberal democracies must repudiate their ideologies to work. They would not be able to survive if they followed their own rules.

Examined from the point of view of the individual, states constantly interfere with private desires. Looked at from the point of view of the state, individuals stand in the way of the modernization process. Modernizing state builders—in the United States, existing in a direct line from Alexander Hamilton to Herbert Croly to Samuel P. Huntington—have always been somewhat uncomfortable with the flabbiness and inefficiency of democracy. There can be no question that a system which builds liberal individualism and the theory of popular control into its rhetoric, while capable of fantastic economic growth under the right conditions, is not a system that can prepare for war or respond to economic malfunctions without convulsions. (In this sense, my own preference for liberal democratic over authoritarian states—let it be clear that this is my preference—is due to my ambiguous, when not negative, feelings about modernity; unenamored of a strong national defence and capital-intensive growth, the awkwardness of liberal democracy I sometimes experience as a pleasure.) Modern liberal democracies, in short, live with a constant tension between their pre-modern self conceptions and their modern activities, perpetually torn between a citizenry longing for the private realm of free choice and dependence on public coercion to grow and survive. No wonder that disappointment and modernity grow together.

Inauthenticity, to return to the theme of this essay, is the price paid by liberal democracy to exist under conditions of modernity. If Western societies were true to their modernizing tendencies, they would not try to be democratic at all. If they were to aspire to democracy, they would have to reject modernizing trends and settle for lower rates of growth and smaller military budgets. (Some of the bypassed European democracies—one thinks of Holland and Denmark—are both more democratic and less politically modern than their wealthier and more protected neighbours.) Inauthentic democracy, in
other words, is a compromise position that allows democracies to be modern, and modern societies to be democratic, combining some of the ideology and practice of democratic norms with a state committed to expansion and security. Without the inauthenticity, democracy would be more precarious; without the democracy, there would be no problem of inauthenticity. Inauthenticity is a source of social stability but also of public discontent.

One could conclude that since inauthenticity is the best defence against an even more ruthlessly authoritarian state, the social theorist should find praise for those features of public life in liberal democracy that do not offer genuine political expression—as many have. But another alternative exists. Instead of accepting modernity and designing a state to meet its demands, one can try to design a democratic state and allow modernization to fall where it may. In the latter spirit, I wish to try and calculate some of the social costs that a liberal democracy like the United States has paid to sustain an inauthentic democracy.

III: The Dynamics of Inauthentic Democracy As heirs to the Enlightenment, democratic theorists developed a long list of expectations for the democratic citizen. The spread of democracy, accompanied of course by education and progressive disenchantment, would result in more informed individuals exercising the suffrage in rational ways. Not too many observers would conclude that these expectations have been fulfilled. From the moment such sentiments were first articulated in the eighteenth century until the present, there has been a vast disappointment with the rationality of the democratic citizen, culminating in Joseph Schumpeter's devastating critique of the classical conception of democracy, lately embellished by neo-conservative writers. In the United States, where universal suffrage and mass education are taken for granted, also taken for granted are extensive non-participation, ill-informed and symbolic voting, and a political system that has turned demagoguery into an art form.

What went wrong? In one important sense, nothing. Citizens who do not conform to the classical expectations of democracy are, whether self-consciously or not, conforming very well to the expectations of modernity. Since a modern state is
one that places the concentration of national political power over such old-fashioned notions as republican virtue, it makes sense not to become too informed or too exercised about the directions of public policy. Critical intellectuals, after all, are extremely well informed and excessively concerned, and the price they pay is constant frustration with mass opinion. (I consider myself something of a knowledgeable person, and my concern with public issues often rebounds to my private disadvantage, yet I have come to accept as natural that the majority of American will feel differently than myself on most issues.) Perhaps there is a higher sophistication operating here, a recognition that if the purpose of political life is not to alter the direction of modernity, then one may as well vote for the candidate who can mouth with more apparent sincerity lines written by others.

A modern liberal democracy can be thought of as a social contract in which people receive the benefits of modernity, in return for not asking too many awkward questions about it. There are unquestionable mass benefits obtained from the modernization process. More rapid economic growth offers material satisfactions, consumer goods, personal and social mobility, and other hardly dismissable benefits. National security, if properly advanced, offers relief from war and external aggression, and a certain predictability and rationality in a world not known for those qualities. So great are the advantages of modernity, and so difficult is it to contemplate living without them once they have been obtained, that people will go to enormous lengths to keep them. If the quality of public life must be sacrificed a bit to keep the quantity of private life plentiful, it seems a small price to pay.

Unfortunately, the quality of public life does have to be sacrificed to keep material benefits high. Economic growth, as I have argued elsewhere, extracts political costs. No capitalist society can experience growth without offering incentives to the private sector for investment purposes, and one of the sure incentives demanded is a partial dismantling of the democratic apparatus of the state. Neither a highly mobilized and articulate citizenry, nor the pursuit of equity in public policy are compatible with a "favorable business climate". When business is the only "interest group" that can provide a steady and munificent supply of campaign funds and organizational skills,
both politics and policy will be curtailed to win business support.\textsuperscript{16} A healthy public life, genuinely pluralistic and independent of business pressure, cannot exist when economic growth becomes the first priority of the state.

The security needs of the modern state also undermine the capacity to practice a vibrant politics. Military bureaucracies are self-consciously repressive in outlook, viewing the suppression of information and the stilling of controversy as matters of national honour. When people entrust their security to the state, they find themselves asked to sacrifice more and more of their political rights to sustain that security. No society can devote itself to military power and remain primarily committed to a vision of an open society and liberal state. Obedience and rank are the essence of militarized citizenship, not dissent and equality. Militarized liberal democracies are constantly put into the position of sacrificing their ideals to protect their ideals, and it does not take extreme foresight to recognize that the end result of this process will be the lack of any more ideals to sacrifice. In the quest for security, protection is offered in return for passivity.

Economic growth and military security, the fundamental objectives of the modern state, exist in basic tension with the liberal and democratic imperatives of an earlier era. By themselves, the pursuit of these two objectives work to shrink and distort the public life of modern liberal democracies. But in recent years, the pursuit of growth and security has become much more problematic. In the recessionary conditions of the 1970s and 1980s, nation-states sacrifice more and more public vitality to achieve growth, yet find themselves more than ever mired in stagnation. There are as well, as Fred Hirsch reminds us, social limits to growth, built-in mechanisms that offer decreasing returns for each effort to expand privileges.\textsuperscript{17} Meanwhile, massive expenditures on arms, which contribute in their fashion to declining growth rates, also result in decreasing returns; every significant increase in spending for national security, after a certain point, seems to create additional insecurity. As growth and security become harder to obtain, the political sacrifices necessary to achieve them intensify. If the United States is an example, a frenzy of political suicide has characterized recent public life; city governments, state governments and people in general indicate repeatedly their willingness to
dispense with elementary conditions of citizenship and sovereignty, in order to return to the golden era of growth and security. The only kind of public life more unhealthy than that of a growth economy is an economy that, having grown, can grow no more.

Modern liberal democracies are inauthentic because they can only survive if the assumptions of modernity itself are selected out of the political process. In other words, no modern society can experience economic growth if it questions economic growth, because to question the direction is to keep alive a healthy public life which is incompatible with the requirement of business confidence. Similarly, no society can be secure if it makes security a political issue, for the very debate and controversy around the meaning of security would undermine security as the national security managers view it. In authoritarian societies, the lack of debate on these questions is enforced through coercion, with only the most minimal and symbolic involvement of those who are governed. But in liberal democracies, the situation is far more complicated. People themselves must voluntarily refuse to raise larger questions about the meaning of growth and security, understanding that if they do, both will be lost. The social contract of modern liberal democracy then, is one in which the state agrees to provide growth and security on the condition that the citizens accept the state's objectives as their objectives. So long as both sides to the contract play their parts, liberal democracy survives. The conditions of its survival is that its political institutions lose the capacity to articulate authentic needs, and become devoted instead to the plebiscitary task of affirming the overall consensus. Inauthenticity gives to political institutions an entirely new meaning.

Consider, for example, the institution known as the suffrage. In most models of democracy, voting, like consumer choice, is assumed to represent the expression of a preference. So it does, but unanswered—and, in economics, unasked—is the question of what the preference means. Hirschman has argued that the act of voting itself inhibits more meaningful political acts:

The trouble with the vote, in other words, is not so much that the outcome of voting is stacked, because of the way in which economic and political power is distributed in society: rather, it is that the vote delegitimates more direct, intense, and "expressive" forms of political action that are both more effective and more satisfying.
Voting, in short, becomes almost a depoliticizing act, a ritual that absolves the citizen from the need to know or, sometimes, even care. (When I tell my students of my disinclination to vote, I respond to their charge that I have forfeited my right to criticize the government by arguing, to their shock, that only those who refuse to vote, by not degrading themselves through the sufrage, retain an obligation to comment on public affairs.)

In a modern liberal democracy, where the direction of modernity is itself not subject to choice, voting assumes an inauthentic character, expressing, at best, alternative means to the same end. Why then do people vote? Aside from the fact that some means are preferable to others, there is another rationale for the suffrage. Voting serves as a confirmation of the troublesome course on which modern liberal democracies are embarked. Growth and security, while providing great material benefits, also extract substantial costs, especially in an era of stagnation and international insecurity. The democratic social contract is a tenuous one, requiring frequent reaffirmation. Voting becomes part of the process by which ordinary citizens contain their doubts about the direction their willingness to be modern. Liberal democracies, in short, operate by a sort of democratic self-oppression; understanding that the choices facing the modern citizen are limited, voters in a liberal democracy choose for themselves what few choices they can exercise. Through Proposition 13 in California, for example, voters forced austerity on themselves rather than having it forced upon them by others, a relatively rational act under the circumstances.

Voting can be thought of as a form of goal affirmation, even if in recent years it has also become linked to means rejection. When citizens vote, they confirm their status as partners in the modernization process, reasserting their expectation that they will be offered growth and security in return for their willingness to participate in their quest. Without popular legitimacy, the state after all cannot raise taxes, and without tax funds, the policies designed to promote growth and security cannot be forthcoming. But the inability of the state in recent years to satisfy popular needs for growth and security works to delegitimize its authority and to undermine its ability to collect tax revenue. This dissatisfaction with the social contract can be traced to its asymmetry. The benefits from growth and security
are obtained in the future, but the costs, in taxes, are paid in the present. Voters, as a result, become predisposed to use the electoral process to indicate their unhappiness with the means to reach a goal upon which they are all agreed. The more the system demands happiness with the goals, in short, the more it must expect unhappiness with the means.

An important distinction developed by Harry Frankfurt and applied by Albert Hirschman is relevant to this discussion. Human preferences, Frankfurt argued, can be divided into first and second order desires. The former involve everyday forms of behavior roughly akin to basic animal functions like eating and sleeping. Second order preferences are desires about desires, conscious self-reflection on the choices that we make which define our status as humans. In economics, this distinction is useful in discussing the difference between needs that are beyond the purview of, and may be in contradiction to, most economistic models of human behavior.

Frankfurt's distinction corresponds to the idealized interpretation of the Greek *polis* developed by Hannah Arendt. Economic functions (household activities like getting and spending) are viewed as first order desires, important to be sure, but not reflective of a deeper human consciousness which is expressed through the *polis*. Political action, the *vita activa*, constitutes the realm in which citizens affirm their conception of the larger human community, of which they are a part. Whether this separation of private and public life ever existed in fact, the modern state has reversed the priorities. When they vote, modern citizens are not so much expressing their deepest thoughts on the nature of human community, as they are projecting their first order preferences onto the body politic as a whole, expressing what Michael Laver has called "the politics of private desires". For example, all citizens in a capitalist society have a "need" to find work, which will enable them to survive. Having little control over ostensibly private corporations, which can destroy jobs, and thereby communities, almost at will, such citizens turn to the "public" sector by voting for candidates who promise rapid economic growth. In so doing, they are articulating a private preference through public action, not ascertaining the nature of the public space in which they are located. So long as consensus exists over the public goals of growth and security, politics deals with disputes over private needs.
As more and more of the political system is turned over to the articulation of such first order preferences, the capacity of the state to engage in disinterested action is lost. In the republican tradition, public life serves as an arena somewhat detached from the adversary struggle of private interests. The best lawmaker was the one who could see through the clash of private wills and discover a common good, a sphere of disinterest, that structured the space within which the clash of specific interests took place. Ruling elites have used such notions of disinterest to legitimate their rule, but to the degree that gentlemen civic reformers, for example, were willing to be "traitors to their class" in the interests of long-term stability, a condition of relative disinterestedness became possible. No longer. When the public arena becomes the place onto which private needs are projected, the state loses the capacity to say no, and democracy becomes, in the term used by Jane Mansbridge, increasingly adversary. Politicians compete with each other to discover the best method of reflecting the private fears and anxieties of the voters, nowadays hiring sophisticated technicians to plumb the depths of mass opinion and write programmed responses to it. He or she wins office who best articulates not a vision of the public good, but a convincing explanation of private unease.

Without disinterestedness, democracy becomes increasingly narcissistic. Voters demand politicians who will tell them exactly—literally, exactly—what they want to hear. Yet when politicians offer the required assurances that they, too, worry about crime and favour capital punishment, voters, often unconsciously, lose respect at such demonstrations of servility. Narcissistic democracy creates a cycle of disillusionment, since voters can bring themselves to vote only for those who have demonstrated that, by all the criteria of interpersonal standard of conduct, they violate every norm of trustworthiness. It is not so much that voters overlook seamy behavior; they appear to demand it. Citizens accept as normal, and even as desirable, behavior from their leaders which, if manifested by their friends, would cause grief.

Politicians, in turn, experiment with various styles of inauthenticity, looking for the right formula that will guarantee political success. At one time, politicians worried that the gap between their own beliefs and what they were forced to say in
public would expose them to the charge of hypocrisy. One of the advantages of narcissistic democracy is that it abolishes the problem of hypocrisy. As candidates are selected who have no particular beliefs of their own, they can adopt with greater ease whatever assortment of “themes” or “concepts” are recommended by their technicians. Indeed some politicians have even come to understand that the highest form of inauthenticity is authenticity, proudly and self-consciously proclaiming their lack of belief in anything. If a certain contempt toward the citizenry emerges on the part of those who manipulate it, this is understandable. Just as voters demand self-abasement from politicians before they vote for them, politicians must degrade the voters privately, in order to lavish flattery on them publically. The voting process in modern liberal democracy increasingly becomes a mutual degradation ceremony.

If any of these conjectures are even partially correct, they imply a revision of the theory of mandates. Classical democratic theory suggested that, during elections, voters would supply to policymakers a sense of the direction they wished their society to take. Mandates undoubtedly exist in liberal democracy, but the structure of inauthenticity confuses their meaning. The problem now is to interpret the mandate; to seek a mandate on the mandate, so to speak. The task is not an easy one, for the deeper desires (second order preferences) of the populace can often be in direct contradiction to what the surface vote, or first order preference, indicates. For example, voters may share a “liberal” fear of corporate privilege that is expressed by voting for a “conservative”. Similarly, desires to “conserve” jobs and ways of life are often linked to “liberal” positions. This represents more than a problem of language, although a linguistic problem certainly does exist. More significant is the conjecture that, as politics becomes even more devoted to the pursuit of private ends, no mechanism exists for reaching deeper structures of meaning and experience, and translating them into mandates for public policy. Those who possess feelings about the overall meaning of the human community, and wish to translate them into reality, would do better than to enter the formal political process.

Much has been made in recent years of the fickleness of the American public as it swings back and forth from liberal wishes
to conservative reactions. Perhaps the problem is not fickleness at all, but the simultaneous existence of opposed political consciousness being expressed in different ways. The problem is not whether policymakers represent the wishes of those who elect them, but which wishes are to be represented. Political practices like voting do not allow citizens to indicate which of their wishes have top priority, causing considerable confusion as a result.

As growth evaporates and insecurity increases, voters in many societies, including the United States, turn to politicians who call themselves "conservative". The rise of the "new right" from its former isolation at the fringe end of the political spectrum is often viewed as a reaction against the welfare state and its costs. But the rise of the new right is as important for its form, as well as for its content, for conservative politicians (at least in the United States) have carried the art of inauthentic politics to a new level. The most extreme example concerns attitudes toward the deficit. It is impossible for advanced capitalist societies to function as growth machines and military bureaucracies without running deficits, given public opposition to increased taxation. If responsibility were still a factor in political life, those politicians who were responsible for rapid increases in the deficit would presumably be held accountable for their actions by the electorate. But this has not happened under the Reagan administration. The President, whose taxing and spending policies have resulted in the largest deficit in American history, simultaneously endorses a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution, as if other, even diabolic, forces were responsible for the problem. Then, in an effort to curtail social spending they do not like, conservatives introduce a bill to force, through legislative mandate, balanced budgets by the year 1991, only to find liberals and Democrats rushing to support it. The result is that the kind of crowd behavior that reactionary anti-dems orats, such as Gustave LeBon, associated with the masses are adopted by the elite. Policymakers give up completely tying rational ends to specified means. The life of liberal democracy becomes devoted to satisfying immediate demands in the present, without regard for the future. The insatiable appetites of narcissistic democracy must be satisfied, whatever the economic and political consequences.
Right wing and conservative forces have, thus, an inherent advantage when politics enters the realm of inauthenticity. It is far easier to speak to first order kinds of preferences, relating almost to animal-like sentiments like revenge, than it is to issues of social solidarity and community. In the atmosphere of contemporary politics, the right's emotionalism and subjectivity seems to respond to popular needs, while the left's insistence on old fashioned ideals seems ponderous, uninspired, anti-dramatic. The new right, in short, has gained the upper hand by being the first to practice a fairly ruthless commitment to first order politics, setting a course that other political tendencies, first reluctantly and then enthusiastically, begin to follow. What may be the most important legacy of the new right is not the cruelty of its programs or the contradictions in its vision, but its insistence that a realm of human activity called politics, that was once reserved for public needs, can be used for the satisfaction of private ends. The quest for short-term profit and speculative gain, characteristic of the new wave of economic growth in advanced capitalism, is matched by a short-term politics of resentment/manipulation in advanced liberal democracy.

If authenticity is defined as the capacity of a political system to offer choices that permit individual self-fulfillment through social cooperation, modern liberal democracies, for all the reasons described here, have become increasingly inauthentic. One can either be grateful that any democracy has survived at all in this century of the modern state, or remain critical that democracy has failed to live up to its promise of increased freedom and mature politics. But one cannot, it seems to me, hold that the quality of public life in modern liberal democracy has permitted ordinary people to use the political process to create a positive vision of a fuller social life for themselves and their communities.

IV: Inside the Prisoner's Dilemma We return then, to the problem of false consciousness. I have argued in this paper that the debate over false consciousness has been miscast. Instead of contesting whether or not a decision that appears to be against the "interest" of those who make it represents an incorrect perception of their needs, I have suggested that the problem may be that accurate perceptions of needs cannot be translated into political preferences under the existing practices of modern
liberal democracy. There are many forms of "consciousness", and while the political systems of modern liberal democracies have become quite good—almost too good—at reflecting consciousness about private needs, the capacity to respond to public and social needs has been all but lost. When private and public needs are in conflict, elections no longer serve as clear mandates, and substantial resentment and apparently inconsistent political behavior become features of everyday public life.

The problem of inauthenticity in public life is roughly similar to the problem of self interest in private activity. Since Adam Smith, liberal theorists have posited that the pursuit of private interest works to promote the common good. Yet in one situation, that of the prisoner's dilemma, the opposite holds. If two criminals who committed a crime together are arrested and individually interrogated, both will be let go if neither confesses. But each one, attempting to maximize his self interest, has an incentive to lay the blame on the other, which would then lead to the conviction of both. Under these circumstances, rational self interest produces the greatest harm, not the greatest good. Inauthentic democracy has the quality of the prisoner's dilemma. Each individual votes for specific programmes, which, while perfectly rational, harm everyone—such as the relaxation of pollution control laws mentioned earlier. (Proposition 13 is another example where the understandable private need to pay less taxes destroys the public goods shared by all.) The structure of choices in modern liberal democracy increasingly forces people to uphold their self interest at the risk of undermining society, or to work to preserve society at the risk of sacrificing private need.

So long as the goal structure of society places maximum reward on the pursuit of private goods, a situation is created in which the conditions of inauthentic democracy constantly reinforce themselves. The system can be saved, putting it another way, only by a significant number of people deliberately working against the logic of the system. Political authenticity is counterproductive to economic rationality. It makes perfect economic sense for air polluters to oppose air pollution controls, but it only makes political sense for individuals and groups to oppose them if they are not vulnerable to, or have chosen to reject, cost-benefit calculations. Similarly a debate be-
tween a weapons manufacturer and a nuclear freeze advocate is a debate carried on in two contrasting languages; one side speaking of interest, the other, of disinterest. (More and more, debates in the United States have this quality, as if tobacco manufacturers and consumer watchdogs had exactly the same interest in the outcome of regulatory policy.) Authenticity can be returned to democracy only when political movements arise that can transcend the rational pursuit of self interest.

It is much commented upon that reformers in the United States tend to be of an upper-middle class bent. No-growth movements, it has been charged, are attempts by those who have already won a privileged place in society to keep it for themselves. The peace movement, one hears endlessly, appeals to middle class whites, but not to poor blacks. Feminism, we have been told, is a nice idea for comfortable women, but says little of relevance to minority welfare recipients. At one level, such arguments contain an element of truth, for reform movements do tend to be dominated by middle class people. At another level however, this critique of reformism misses the major point. Minority and working class people have an interest in both jobs and a healthy environment. War has traditionally exerted disproportionate costs among the poor, even if opposed more consistently by the non-poor. Equality is as relevant to poor women as it is to wealthy women. The real issue is that the kinds of politics practised by such reformers is a different kind of politics, one that calls for the creation of distance between private needs and public wants. One of the great privileges that class can purchase in a class society is the ability to practise a politics of authenticity. Cost-benefit considerations force the poor to assert their first order survival needs more vigorously than their second order humanitarian needs, even if both needs are vital to a meaningful life.

As modern liberal democracies face seemingly intractable economic problems and international tensions, two kinds of politics will continue to vie for attention. On the one hand, immediate private needs will intensify inauthentic politics, for more and more people will find themselves projecting their uncertainty and unease on the political system itself. At the same time however, the deterioration of public life and the risks of international conflict will also intensify movements of disinterest, quality of life movements that seek to transcend ad-
versary democracy and create a space for a more authentic politics. A number of writers have begun wondering whether the immediate future will see a continuation of the current shift to the right. The really important choice however, may involve not direction but character; whether politics will continue to be a quest for private needs, or whether a reinvigorated conception of public space can be created.

Notes
3. “The liberal ideal is a social order in which free people act within a just power structure. Neither half of this formula can be forgotten in the ongoing struggle that is liberal politics.” Bruce A. Ackerman, *Social Justice in the Liberal State* (New Haven, 1980), p. 376. Emphasis in the original.
4. A recent book that argues a very similar point in a very different way is Robert Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart* (Berkeley, 1984).
12. One partial exception is V.O. Key. See *The Responsible Electorate* (Cambridge, 1966).
15. See the conclusion of Lindblom's *Politics and Markets* for a sober assessment of the relationship between capitalism and democracy.
19. The concept of selectivity has been developed by Claus Offe in “Political Authority and Class Structure,” *International Journal of Social Science* (Spring 1972), pp. 73-108.
25. The term "narcissistic democracy" has been developed by Francis Hearn in unpublished papers, and in correspondence with the author.