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To my parents

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation argues for the democratic potentials of political struggles over social welfare policies and institutions, potentials neglected by currently dominant approaches in democratic theory. I contend that critics underestimate the welfare state's democratic significance because they conceive of political economy strictly in terms of instrumental mastery and technical calculation. This conception forms the implicit backdrop for deliberative-democratic defenses of the welfare state, which present it as the victory of universal solidarities over market imperatives and socioeconomic risks, as well as for radical-democratic critics, who present the welfare state as the consummation of the regulatory effects of modern state power.

In place of these dominant approaches, I advance an understanding of welfare institutions as worldly mediators between economic needs and public action. Engaging with the thought of Max Weber, Martin Heidegger, Hannah Arendt, and Jürgen Habermas, the dissertation both diagnoses the assumptions that lead contemporary democratic theory astray and develops an alternate view of welfare institutions. I then turn to the histories of exemplary struggles over the welfare state, showing that my approach better illuminates the possibilities for democratic engagement with welfare institutions that these movements practiced.

The dissertation begins by examining the socio-theoretic underpinnings of Weber's thought and the influence of his thought on subsequent democratic theories of the welfare state. In the second chapter, I turn to Weber's historical and political context to recover the forms of democratic engagement with welfare institutions occluded by his thought. In particular, I reconstruct two competing visions of the social in nineteenth-century Germany: an integrative, liberal vision articulated by thinkers such as Lorenz von Stein, Gustav Schmoller, and Max Weber, and a working-class vision forged in the political struggles of the SPD. I next look to

aspects of Heidegger and Arendt's thought to develop my approach to welfare institutions as what I call worldly mediators. Finally, through examinations of Habermas's theory of late capitalism and feminist political struggles focused on welfare institutions, the final portion of the dissertation examines how a view of welfare institutions as worldly mediators can expand our understandings of democratic political struggles seeking to overcome domination.

## **Introduction**

Politically, the twentieth century was the century of the welfare state. While the networks of institutions typically seen as the basis of the welfare state—ranging across social insurance, labor market regulation, poor relief, and public health and housing—began to take shape in the nineteenth century, with historical roots deeper into the practices of local poor relief, in the twentieth century a broad political consensus emerged in Western Europe and North America that the state was responsible for the physical health, economic security, and general wellbeing of society's members. The formerly localized responsibilities of the family and small-scale municipalities were nationalized and became the common concern of an imagined political community. In Eastern Europe and the Global South, many states undertook ambitious modernization projects that included efforts to construct social welfare guarantees. And these transformations in the state's responsibility for mitigating social and economic risks coincided with the development of formalized legal and regulatory intervention into the sphere of economic production, such as through the legal recognition of trade unionism and collective bargaining. Finally, the rise of welfare institutions intersected with many of the most fraught struggles for the expansion of democratic powers and institutions, such as the struggle for universal suffrage. Indeed, the emergence of the welfare state has had a deep and abiding influence on the contours of these struggles for democratic rights, institutions, and spaces of action, democracy understood here in terms of structures and practices that serve to organize and empower the relatively weak and disorganized majorities as well as subordinate groups vis-à-vis dominant social groups.

The question guiding the following is: how have welfare politics furthered these democratic aspirations and how have they thwarted them? For emancipatory social movements

attacking entrenched structures of domination and advancing solidaristic claims for democratic participation, the mid-century welfare state was always an ambivalent object of attachment.

While social welfare institutions and policies often aligned with their aims, radical critics of the existing social order were uneasy about the welfare state's paternalistic and integrative effects. They worried about the dissipation of radical energies—a dissipation that was often the point of the political concessions contained in social reforms—as well as the tendency of social policies to reframe emancipatory claims as material interests and needs that could be administered by state institutions. Moreover, ongoing research in comparative political economy now attests to the important functional role welfare institutions play in securing the conditions of capitalist accumulation, rather than just, as defenders on the left and critics on the right assume, augmenting collective democratic action that distorts market mechanisms. In short, welfare institutions have historically been caught between the aspirations of emancipatory movements and the imperatives of the existing social and political order.

The following develops a democratic theory of the welfare state that emphasizes this ambiguity while pointing towards a participatory and emancipatory politics of the welfare state and of struggles over the social: a historically-grounded vision that could stand as an animating alternative to our contemporary market-oriented political consensus. My central contention is that contemporary democratic theory has failed to generate such a vision precisely because it lacks a theory of the ambiguous character of the welfare state—a theory that could, I submit, emerge from a revival of the critical theorization of political economy. Contemporary democratic theory has paid remarkably little attention to the critique of political economy, both in its attempts to grasp the historical significance of the welfare state and in its theorization of its future.

Here, I argue that contemporary democratic theory fails to contend with political economy and so develop an adequate account of the welfare state because it is held captive by the categories produced by Max Weber's social and political thought. Weber, confronting the democratic demands of the German socialist movement, reformulated the critique of political economy as a critique of instrumentality. And his view forms the implicit backdrop for prominent conceptions of democratic agency and horizons of practical possibility in current democratic theory. Yet Weber's view is inadequate, both for theorizing the nature of economic forces and institutions and for analyzing for the welfare state. To advance this point, I reconstruct the implicit critique of Weber's approach in the thought of Heidegger, Arendt, and Habermas, who together point towards a theory of political economy and the welfare state that focuses on what I call the worldly mediation between economic needs and collective, potentially emancipatory, democratic action. This understanding of the relationship between the political and the economic is evident in political struggles over welfare institutions, such as the engagement of the German working-class with Bismarck's social insurance laws and post-war feminist movements advancing a more radically egalitarian vision of social welfare. Yet democratic theorists have been unable to grasp and appreciate these emancipatory potentials because their interpretations remain over-determined by Weber's thought. Viewed through the theoretical categories I develop in my readings of Heidegger, Arendt, and Habermas, however, these movements reveal the historical traces of a radically democratic, participatory welfare state—one that has yet to be realized.

### Capitalism and the Welfare State in Democratic Theory

The welfare state forms a central component of the historical conditions under which democratic ideals and aspirations can be advanced today. Democratic social movements and

practices must contend with the institutional interpenetration of state, society, and the economy and with the administrative management of broad swaths of individual's lives through the regulation of social and economic risk. Yet how theorists conceptualize this terrain will, in part, be produced by the more basic categories—of democratic agency, institutional structure, and social power and domination—through which they interpret both the possibilities for and impediments to democratic self-rule. Indeed, evaluations of the welfare state in current democratic theory closely mirror broader divides in how political theorists articulate the ideal of democracy—most centrally, that between so-called deliberative and agonistic accounts of democratic agency. Yet, despite their professed differences, these views share crucial similarities when it comes to theorizing the relationship between the welfare state and economic structures, and so, more generally, of the structure of democratic capitalism. While deliberative democrats focus on whether and how welfare institutions can be aligned with the idealized presuppositions of public communication, radical democrats worry about the stultifying, normalizing, and rationalizing effects of welfare institutions. Both approaches rest on an implicit view of welfare institutions as technical mechanisms for managing social and economic risks and redistributing resources—technical mechanisms that should either be guided by public deliberation or else rejected for their stultifying effects.

Thus, rather than try to attenuate or mediate the opposition between these two general views, I unearth and identify the shared assumptions that produce their opposition in the first place. In particular, both views arise from and are reinforced by a common understanding of the relationship of political agency to economic forces and institutions. In the absence of a renewed theorization of political economy, contemporary political theory tends to approach the welfare state in one of two opposed voices: either as the instantiation of expansive normative ideals, in

need of articulation and defense, or else as a new and more insidious vehicle of social domination, in need of unmasking and resistance. Both conceptions of the welfare state rest on a view of welfare institutions—and modern economic structures and forces more broadly—that construes them exclusively in terms of means-ends, instrumental calculation.

At the core of a theory of democracy as deliberative democracy is the insight that democracy enables society to resolve conflict and solve societal problems with the use of speech rather than coercion. Thus, while much work in deliberative democracy focuses on specific institutional mechanisms that can expand, often at a micro level, the scope and intensity of deliberation in society, deliberative-democratic theory also provides a justificatory framework in which to conceptualize the value and significance of welfare institutions for democracy. The deliberative-democratic defense of the welfare state picks up on impulses already articulated in the mid-twentieth century in T. H. Marshall's seminal account of citizenship and social rights. Marshall presents the welfare state as the culmination of an expansion of rights, one in which the granting of more formal rights, such as the economic liberty to choose one's profession or the right to vote, produces political pressure to equalize individuals' substantive, material well-being. While civic, political, and social rights were once "wound into a single thread," modernization destroyed this traditional communal integration and put each set of rights onto a different historical trajectory.<sup>1</sup> Most importantly for theorizing the welfare state, Marshall argues that the expansion of political rights generated demands, especially on the part of the working class, for social rights that would equalize their status and enable them to substantially realize what political rights formally promised. As Marshall understands it, the welfare state simply reflects this expansion of formal political rights, which generated "an urge towards a fuller

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<sup>1</sup> T. H. Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class* (London: Pluto Press, 1992), 8.

measure of equality, an enrichment of the stuff on which the status is made and an increase in the number of those on whom the status is bestowed.”<sup>2</sup>

Deliberative-democratic defenses seek to further develop Marshall’s insights and situate them within a broader view of the legitimacy and structure of democratic participation. Yet they retain the same basic theoretical intuition; namely, that rights to equal participation and influence, to be effective, presuppose the material equalization of people’s means to participate in politics. Kevin Olson has recently attempted to develop this line of reasoning into “a more solid normative perspective on the welfare state,” and his effort provides particularly clear insight into the structure and assumptions of the deliberative-democratic defense of the welfare state.<sup>3</sup> Olson attempts to derive a normative defense of the welfare state from the substantive presuppositions of the democratic rule of law in Western modernity. Arguing against the excessive conceptual focus on “economic issues” like “class, distribution, and market regulation” which invite public controversy, Olson proposes to expand our understanding of welfare so that the concept encompasses cultural and political and not only economic dimensions.<sup>4</sup> Welfare rights, he argues, secure the possibility of equal political voice in the reflexive constitution of the terms of social co-operation. Olson’s elegant and sophisticated account is guided by the conviction that the welfare rights are implicit in the idea of democratic deliberation and cooperation—that the very notion of the rule of law already presupposes broad guarantees of

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>3</sup> Kevin Olson, *Reflexive Democracy: Political Equality and the Welfare State* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006), 5. While Olson spells it out at greater length, he is not the first to attempt to derive welfare entitlements from the presuppositions and requirements of equal citizenship. For earlier efforts, see Elizabeth S Anderson, "What Is the Point of Equality?," *Ethics* 109, no. 2 (1999); Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, trans. William Rehg (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998), 388-427 (although Habermas is ultimately critical of what he terms the "substantive" view of legal rights).

<sup>4</sup> Olson, *Reflexive Democracy: Political Equality and the Welfare State*, 3.

individual's material security so that they can participate in the formation of the terms of their political cooperation. Yet this defense, as I will argue, comes at a cost, one that it shares with Marshall: it tells us little about the role of welfare institutions in stabilizing hierarchical structures of domination in capitalist social systems. And it is this anxiety that produces a variety of radical-democratic critiques of welfare institutions—critiques that, rather than trying to subordinate welfare institutions, like means, to the ultimate end of reflexive democratic participation, seeks to show how the instrumental imperatives of the welfare state overwhelm spaces of collective, such that authentic democratic agency can only emerge in moments of rupture and disruption.

Opposed to the deliberative-democratic view, then, are a variety of perspectives that seek to theorize these disciplinary and normalizing effects of welfare institutions. These theorists, who I am loosely grouping as radical-democratic or agonistic theorists, emphasize the implication of welfare measures in the markedly non-democratic imperatives of the modern state and capitalist economy. In certain respects, these views echo earlier Marxist critiques of the welfare state for deradicalizing and integrating workers into the dominant social order. Yet they go beyond such critiques by expanding the purview of power beyond economic domination so as to grasp the more general constitution and regulation of the social as a field of objects for state management. While these accounts draw on a variety of theoretical sources, the seminal influence is Michel Foucault's account of disciplinary power and the modern state's constitution of the population as an object of regularity and management, which converges in certain respects with Arendt's notion of the rise of the social.<sup>5</sup> In their view, the deliberative-democratic approach reflects both

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<sup>5</sup> See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1977); *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1977-1978*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2007); and the essays in Graham

blindness to the subtle interweaving of power and the modern state as well as a desire to tame and contain the democratic impulses that could disrupt the normalizing power embodied in welfare institutions. For example, Anna Marie Smith, examining the trajectory of welfare reform in the United States, argues that welfare institutions have been bound up with the capitalist state's functional imperative to produce "a docile, stratified, and productive work force" as well as with the dominant social norms and structures of power by regulating female sexuality.<sup>6</sup> For these theorists, welfare functions, not to expand pre-existing norms of citizenship, but to produce a certain image of responsible, empowered citizenship that is itself inimical to more expansive and alternate democratic possibilities.<sup>7</sup>

These theoretical deadlocks in conceptualizations of the welfare state are closely mirrored in contemporary democratic theory more generally. Indeed, the contrasting approaches to the welfare state are based on opposed understandings of democratic agency: whether democracy is a form of self-rule grounded in reciprocal reason-giving, or else an insurgent agency periodically challenging inevitably hierarchical structures of rule. So, Olson worries that reflexively grounding the welfare state in political equality warrants "a kind of norm-free legal positivism or a democratic free-for-all."<sup>8</sup> On the contrary, Olson argues that deriving welfare rights from the substantive preconditions of self-government in fact goes "a long way towards

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Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller, eds., *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991). For insightful further developments and historical applications of the idea of the social, see George Steinmetz, *Regulating the Social: The Welfare State and Local Politics in Imperial Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Patricia Owens, *Economics of Force: Counterinsurgency and the Historical Rise of the Social* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> Anna Marie Smith, *Welfare Reform and Sexual Regulation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 36.

<sup>7</sup> Barbara Cruikshank, *The Will to Empower: Democratic Citizens and Other Subjects* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> Olson, *Reflexive Democracy: Political Equality and the Welfare State*, 109.

limiting what can be democratically decided.”<sup>9</sup> One of Olson’s points in framing the welfare state in terms of social rights is to minimize the extent of popular democratic contestation over welfare programs. More broadly, in presenting welfare as a matter of rights to be secured against a capricious popular will or tyrannical majority, the deliberative-democratic approach reinforces the view that democracy, understood as popular self-rule, must be protected from its own irrationalities.

In contrast to theorists of the rationality of democratic rule, for radical democratic theorists like Sheldon Wolin it is precisely the attempt to manage anarchic democratic energies through political institutions that stands as the problem. “Democracy,” Wolin writes, “was born of transgressive acts” and so “seems destined to be a moment rather than a form.”<sup>10</sup> As a result, “[i]nstitutionalization marks the attenuation of democracy.”<sup>11</sup> Under the contemporary conditions of welfare state capitalism, only “the memory of the political” can allow for episodic eruptions of democratic movements that transgress established institutional boundaries.<sup>12</sup> And Wolin’s insurrectional view of democracy opens up his highly critical analysis of the welfare state. From such a perspective, welfare provisions appear as another augmentation of the almost total domination of the late modern capitalist “Economic Polity” or “megastate.”<sup>13</sup> Wolin argues that both Marx and democratic socialists fail to apprehend the significance of modern sovereignty; their blindness to the political meant that they saw capitalism as a “system of economic power rather than as an economic formation that evolved into a system of power that penetrated and

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>10</sup> Sheldon Wolin, “Fugitive Democracy,” in *Democracy and Difference*, ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 37, 39.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>13</sup> “Democracy and the Welfare State: The Political and Theoretical Connections between *Staaträson* and *Wohlfartsstaaträson*,” in *The Presence of the Past: Essays on the State and the Constitution* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1989), 155, 83.

conditioned” the emerging modern political institutions.<sup>14</sup> When seen as part of the extension of modern sovereignty, welfare programs function as something like a permanent zone of exception for those subject to state control. Wolin’s theorization of democracy in terms of rupture and contestation finds its inverted twin in this image of a totalizing sovereign power in modernity, one that neutralizes the efforts of naïve promoters of the welfare state and twists such programs to its own ends.

In other words, conceptions of the politics of the welfare state are constituted by and in turn help constitute views of democratic agency. And my concern here is how a certain understanding of the relationship between democratic agency and institutional forms, one inspired by Weber, determines both of the above approaches to democracy and the welfare state. For deliberative democrats, the question is how the instrumental structures of administrative institutions like the welfare state can be subordinated to the norms produced through, or immanently derived from, democratic deliberation and public communication. They thus accept Weber’s implicit characterization of welfare institutions as technical mechanisms, even as they depart from him in hoping for more robust legitimating norms to guide them. In contrast, radical democrats reinforce Weber’s presentation of institutional politics as scenes of calculation and rationality, as sites of routinization against which charismatic movements proclaim substantive values. Such charismatic moments must be, however, rare and ephemeral, as the structures produced through charisma are themselves routinized by the demands of the everyday. This can be seen in Wolin’s view that political institutions work to eliminate the “contingency and variability” of political phenomena by rendering them “calculable.”<sup>15</sup> Indeed, Wolin’s emphatic vision of democratic agency presupposes, rather than overcomes, a pessimistic, Weberian view

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 172.

of the inevitability of domination: as ruptural political movements are institutionalized, “leaders begin to appear, hierarchies develop, experts of one kind or another cluster around centers of decision; order, procedure, and precedent displace a more spontaneous politics”—a fact that is as true for ancient Athens as it is for modern states born out of radical revolutions.<sup>16</sup>

While Wolin’s radical-democratic horizon allows him to perceive the domination and depoliticization wrought by the welfare state form, here I ask what political avenues are foreclosed by an image of sovereignty that seems to preemptively doom all efforts at reform that utilize the state. More fundamentally, both the social rights/deliberate-democratic and the radical-democratic frameworks rest, implicitly, on a certain way of construing the relationship between political agency and economic institutions. In the social rights framework, as exemplified in Olson’s work, the norms derived from the immanent presuppositions of law and democratic self-determination are applied as ideal ends to determine the instrumental structure of welfare institutions. Institutions are conceived as means for the end of preserving the possibility of the reflexive constitution of democratic norms. Conversely, for radical democratic critics of the welfare state such as Smith and Wolin, the instrumental imperatives of capitalism and the modern state threaten to overwhelm efforts at institutionally realizing democratic ideals through welfare institutions. And in the background, as Wolin’s thought makes especially clear, is the assumption that modern politics, driven by economic imperatives, reduces all political forms to instrumentality and technical calculation.

### What is Political About Comparative Political Economy?

My contention, then, is that political deadlocks in democratic theory can be overcome through a return to theorizing the location of the economic in democratic societies—or, in other

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<sup>16</sup> "Fugitive Democracy," 39.

words, a revival of the problem of democratic capitalism. For this effort, democratic theory can draw fruitfully on the tradition of comparative political economy. Theories that situate welfare institutions within a broader account of capitalist political economy reveal the importance of democratic contestation and negotiation for the formation and ongoing administration of welfare institutions. Comparative scholars of the welfare state continuously work to bring a conception of collective democratic action back into the study of economic systems. Conversely, comparative political economy scholarship often points to the deep historical and functional interrelationships between welfare institutions and the imperatives of capital accumulation, albeit often at the risk of reducing the welfare state to its economic functions. Indeed, viewing comparative political economy through the lens of democratic theory helps reveal the denuded understanding of the political and democratic agency implicitly accepted by leading comparative accounts of the welfare state. Despite the important disagreements amongst scholars in this literature, they generally agree in presenting welfare institutions as mechanisms either for economic redistribution or mitigating social risks. And, as a result, the view democratic action within welfare institutions primarily in terms of instrumental calculations—economic competition pursued through other means. Thus, just as the following attempts to rethink the economic in democratic theory, so too does it point to the need to rethink the political in political economy.

Contemporary political economy inherits many of the concerns of the historical school of economics, which I discuss in Chapter 3. For the historical school, the rise of social politics held out the promise of both subordinating the imperatives of the economy to deliberate state intervention and policy and averting more radical social transformations by integrating workers into existing political institutions. Similarly, contemporary comparative scholars of the welfare

state view economic institutions as intrinsically connected to political, social, and cultural regimes, and so seek to develop empirical frameworks that can explain the political logics of economic outcomes as well as the economic logics of political outcomes. A crucial question I pursue in the following, then, is whether and how contemporary empirical views of the welfare state also inherit the implicit political horizon of the historical school of economics—a horizon which finds its most articulate expression in Weber’s thought. Empirically, while the first wave of scholarship on the welfare state sought to understand rising social expenditures in terms of a linear process of industrialization and modernization, subsequent work has focused on explaining variation amongst welfare regimes.<sup>17</sup> But notably for my purposes, this effort to distinguish various welfare regimes also evolved as a critical reaction to democratic critiques of the integrative, corporatist structure of expansive welfare institutions—a view that has recently been revived, albeit without the democratic pathos, with the means of neo-classical economic theory. Thus, in many respects, empirical controversies about welfare regimes diversity are interrelated, even if not explicitly, with the normative and political question of how to evaluate the relationship between democratic aspirations and welfare institutions.

The opposition between the power resources approach (PRA) and varieties of capitalism (VoC) organizes current debates about variation among welfare state regimes. Most simply put, PRA views the welfare state as the outcome of working-class political strength, while VoC focuses on how welfare institutions co-evolve with distinctive skill regimes—and so how they often serve the interests of both capital and labor and are advanced by both.<sup>18</sup> Power resources

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<sup>17</sup> For the industrialization view, see Harold L. Wilensky, *The Welfare State and Equality: Structural and Ideological Roots of Public Expenditures* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).

<sup>18</sup> For the classic development of both views, see Gøsta Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990); Peter A. Hall and David Soskice, *Varieties*

scholarship emerged against the backdrop of earlier literature about corporatism, especially work focused on corporatist political arrangements in Scandinavia. These corporatist scholars argued that the welfare state created institutional structures that insulated elite-level negotiations from broader democratic oversight and contestation.<sup>19</sup> And this was especially the case for leaders of the labor movement, who were increasingly divorced from their grassroots constituencies.

Against such a view, PRA scholars emphasized the dependence of these corporatist structures upon broader political and social mobilizations—most importantly, the ability of left parties to dominate in the political system and impose a class compromise on the representatives of capital. As Korpi puts it, “the neo-corporatist assumption that corporatist organizations largely have replaced political parties as important actors leads to an inadequate analysis of the role of the state...a more fruitful hypothesis is that the actions of state representatives and the pattern of coalition formations in the tripartite bargaining between state, labour, and capital can be significantly affected by changes in the strength of working-class-based organizations and by the nature and extent of left party control of the government.”<sup>20</sup>

In line with this, PRA scholars have advanced two central claims about the study of the welfare state: first, that welfare states as clustering into qualitatively different regime types—Esping-Andersen divides regimes into liberal, corporatist, and social-democratic—that cannot be arranged along a linear continuum and that cannot be understood just by looking at total spending. Second, PRA scholars argue that the class power is the main cause of variation among

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*of Capitalism: The Institutional Foundations of Comparative Advantage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>19</sup> For the classic expression of the corporatist theory, see Philippe C. Schmitter, "Still the Century of Corporatism?", *The Review of Politics* 36, no. 01 (1974).

<sup>20</sup> Walter Korpi, *The Democratic Class Struggle* (London: Routledge, 1983), 13.

welfare regimes.<sup>21</sup> Having argued for the importance of welfare regime diversity, Esping-Andersen's central claim is that the relative power of left class coalitions determines welfare regime type. The assumption is that the more egalitarian distribution of political power, through the universal franchise, can be utilized to counter the greater power inequalities of the market. In particular, the welfare state enables workers to pursue a strategy of decommodifying their labor and so reducing their dependency upon the market mechanism. Most important for Esping-Andersen is the ability of the industrial working class to form alliances with agrarian parties and then social democrat's capacity, once in power, to construct policies that can secure broad middle class support. Korpi and Palme, in particular, emphasize the importance, from a PRA perspective, of social institutions that encompass middle class recipients, so as to increase the fiscal capacity of the state.<sup>22</sup>

The VoC school has attacked PRA scholars on several fronts—for being unable to explain why capital would accept the imposition of class domination against their interests and for failing to situate welfare institutions within a broader theory of the organization of economic institutions, such as investment regimes (banks, firms) and skill regimes. In this respect, the VoC literature represents a partial revival of the earlier corporatist view, albeit one that is indebted more to scholarship that emphasized how corporatism contributes to positive growth regimes and overcame zero-sum conflicts rather than how it narrowed democratic participation and

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<sup>21</sup> Following Esping-Andersen, these arguments have been further refined in Evelyne Huber and John D. Stephens, *Development and Crisis of the Welfare State: Parties and Policies in Global Markets* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Walter Korpi, "Power Resources and Employer-Centered Approaches in Explanations of Welfare States and Varieties of Capitalism: Protagonists, Consenters, and Antagonists," *World Politics* 58, no. 2 (2006).

<sup>22</sup> Walter Korpi and Joakim Palme, "The Paradox of Redistribution and Strategies of Equality: Welfare State Institutions, Inequality, and Poverty in the Western Countries," *American Sociological Review* 63, no. 5 (1998).

accountability.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, the VoC approach lacks the implicit democratic horizon of earlier corporatist critiques of the welfare state. Rather, they view the welfare state strictly through the lens of neo-classical economics. For VoC scholars, the central problem that the welfare state solves is skill investment. Firms need workers to invest in skills, but as skills become more and more specialized, such investment becomes riskier for workers. It is riskier because if employees need to change jobs, their new wages will not be commensurate with their skill investment. This leads VoC advocates to draw a broad distinction between general, industry-specific, and firm-specific skills. General skills are highly transferable, while industry and firm specific skills generate the risks that make it hard to encourage workers to invest in them. From this formal micro-foundation, Hall and Soskice argue we can understand the formation of two distinct regime clusters—liberal market economics (LMEs) and coordinated market economics (CMEs)—and see how they can both generate economic growth. Perhaps the greatest accomplishment of VoC scholars is to show, in formal terms, how large welfare states, wage bargaining, and labor market rigidities can all contribute to economic growth, given that a regime has specialized in industry and firm specific skills. The overall picture VoC draws, then, is of the tidy co-evolution of functionally integrated social institutions, each of which serves a clear purpose in overcoming the market failures associated with skill investment. Politically, the VoC marks a universalization of the category of capital. Workers are mini-firms, investing in their fixed assets—skills—and hoping to maximize the return on their investments. Indebted to neoclassical economics and theories of public choice, VoC scholars thus take to an extreme a reductive, economic understanding of the stakes of political struggles over social welfare institutions.

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<sup>23</sup> The landmark work here is Andrew Shonfield, *Modern Capitalism: The Changing Balance of Public and Private Power* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965).

My purpose here is not to intervene directly in the still-ongoing debate between PRA and VoC scholars. Rather, I am interested in what democratic theory can draw from their research and, in turn, in how their analyses of the welfare state rests on implicit assumptions about the relationship between political agency and economic structures. That said, on the whole, my argument is closer to the PRA scholarship, which finds stronger empirical and historical support than the VoC approach.<sup>24</sup> With the PRA scholars, I view welfare institutions as potential vehicles for advancing broader democratic aims and for challenging entrenched relations of social domination. Furthermore, comparative social politics scholars in the PRA school have emphasized the important work welfare institutions do in constituting, rather than just reflecting, organized groups around shared interests—how welfare institutions themselves become the objects of political mobilizations.<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, one important lesson can still be drawn from the VoC literature. VoC scholars point to the functional interweaving of welfare institutions with

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<sup>24</sup> While some historical work, most notably Peter Swenson's, has sought to show that business organizations initiated important welfare measures, the majority of the historical evidence from several crucial cases (the US, Sweden, Germany) reveals labor as the initiator, with business often acquiescing. More generally, the VoC approach has not been able to identify what institutional vehicles translated the alliance of skilled-workers and employers into social policies. And, as Monica Prasad argues, we could just as well expect employer preferences to be the opposite of what is observed: that high-skill employers would want to government subsidies for private pensions and healthcare and general-skill employers would want public programs to support labor mobility. Monica Prasad, *The Land of Too Much: American Abundance and the Paradox of Poverty* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013), 32; Peter A. Swenson, "Varieties of Capitalist Interests: Power, Institutions, and the Regulatory Welfare State in the United States and Sweden," *Studies in American Political Development* 18, no. 01 (2004). For more recent developments of this debate, see Jacob S. Hacker and Paul Pierson, "Varieties of Capitalist Interests and Capitalist Power: A Response to Swenson," *ibid.*, no. 02; Torben Iversen and David Soskice, "Distribution and Redistribution: The Shadow of the Nineteenth Century," *World Politics* 61, no. 03 (2009); Walter Korpi, "Power Resources and Employer-Centered Approaches in Explanations of Welfare States and Varieties of Capitalism: Protagonists, Consenters, and Antagonists," *ibid.* 58, no. 2 (2006); Thomas Paster, "Business and Welfare State Development: Why Did Employers Accept Social Reforms?," *ibid.* 65, no. 03 (2013).

<sup>25</sup> For an overview of these arguments, see Andrea Louise Campbell, "Policy Makes Mass Politics," *Annual Review of Political Science* 15 (2012).

the structuring imperatives of capital accumulation—providing a more specific account of the limits working-class and other social movements have faced when advancing their claims in the welfare state.<sup>26</sup> PRA scholars have no intellectual resources for thinking about how the structural benefits capital receives from welfare state policies could be a crucial part of explaining the persistence of those policies once they are enacted, even if they are created against the resistance of capital. At the very least, the co-evolution of and interplay between unions, employers, and the state is not adequately conceptualized within the PRA approach.

More fundamentally, while the PRA approach attempts to center democratic political conflict in its account of the welfare state, it nonetheless still rests on a narrow understanding of political agency as a form of instrumental, means-ends calculation. Thus, in his classic formulation, Korpi argued we should analyze welfare institutions by viewing power from “a resource perspective and by considering alternative strategies of prudential holders of power resources to improve their net outcomes.”<sup>27</sup> Similarly, while Esping-Andersen says PRA is distinct from structural-functional accounts in its focus “political actors,” Korpi makes clear that these class agents and the actions they will take can be read off of structural exposures to

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<sup>26</sup> For the classic account of the economic limits of revolutionary strategy, see Adam Przeworski, *Capitalism and Social Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). Here, the VoC approach also intersects with scholars who emphasize how welfare institutions compensate for, and so make possible, global trade openness (although not necessarily capital mobility). For this view, see Peter J. Katzenstein, *Small States in World Markets: Industrial Policy in Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); Elmar Rieger and Stephan Leibfried, *Limits to Globalization: Welfare States and the World Economy*, trans. Benjamin W. Veghte (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003).

<sup>27</sup> Walter Korpi, "Contentious Institutions: An Augmented Rational-Action Analysis of the Origins and Path Dependency of Welfare State Institutions in the Western Countries," *Rationality and Society* 13, no. 2 (2001): 244.

risk.<sup>28</sup> If in earlier industrialization theory, differences between regimes was “over-determined” by capitalist modernization, in the PRA school the identity and power of actors is basically over-determined by their structural position with regards to life-course risks and industrial class relations.<sup>29</sup> The logic of the PRA account tends to reduce the political demand for collective self-organization to a reductive economic claim, analyzing it in terms of everyday, material needs. In short, at times, the general picture of the welfare state in the comparative politics literature reinforces Weber’s pessimistic image of instituted politics, and political economy more broadly, as nothing more than the instrumental and technical management of the everyday.

My basic reconsideration of the relationship between instrumentality and democratic agency can cast the PRA view of the welfare state in a new light. In particular, my effort provides a view for situating struggles for democratic participation as an intrinsic aspect of welfare struggles. The perspective I develop points to the central role that welfare institutions play in organizing such spaces of political appearance and judgment. The political struggles, such as for decommodification, that the PRA views as economic competition pursued by other means are actually, as I will argue, at once struggles for economic interests and struggles to constitute spaces of political participation around such interests. Indeed, more recent expansions of the PRA view have begun to theorize these processes and pointed to the intrinsic importance of democratic participation for the politics of the welfare state. While the traditional PRA view focuses primarily on the linkages between the organized working class and labor parties, recent work, especially focusing on the emergence of welfare states in the Global South, has emphasized that labor union success depends to a large extent on their embeddedness in larger

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<sup>28</sup> Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, 14; Korpi, "Power Resources and Employer-Centered Approaches in Explanations of Welfare States and Varieties of Capitalism: Protagonists, Consenters, and Antagonists," 174.

<sup>29</sup> Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, 14.

participatory networks. Cheol-Sung Lee, for instance, has recently shown that the ability of labor to both advance its interests and to resist retrenchment efforts crucially depends on the ability of unions to forge alliances with broader civil society actors and to engage these networks through participatory institutions and mass mobilizations.<sup>30</sup> Here, I draw on this research to further develop a democratic theory of welfare institutions as potential sites of democratic participation and objects of non-technical political judgments.

Finally, both the PRA and the VoC approach, in their original formulations, take as given the gendered division of labor, privileging the male industrial working-class and the domain of formal, paid employment. The view of the relationship between democratic action and welfare institutions that I develop follows feminist critics of these approaches in emphasizing the interaction between social welfare institutions and broader structures of social domination. In her classic essay, Ann Orloff criticizes power resource theorists for, among other things, neglecting the importance of women's unpaid care-giving within households, a double shift which is often exacerbated with women's access to paid employment.<sup>31</sup> Social policy can often have ambiguous, if not contradictory, effects on the multiple burdens women are compelled to carry.<sup>32</sup> Yet, insofar as welfare scholars have made gender a central part of their analysis, their focus has tended to be on the employment patterns and benefit structures for relatively well-off female

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<sup>30</sup> Cheol-Sung Lee, *When Solidarity Works: Labor-Civic Networks and Welfare States in the Market Reform Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Forthcoming).

<sup>31</sup> Ann Shola Orloff, "Gender and the Social Rights of Citizenship: The Comparative Analysis of Gender Relations and Welfare States," *American Sociological Review* 58, no. 3 (1993). And, as Orloff more recently notes, gender has still not been fully incorporated as central to the study of comparative political economy. "Gendering the Comparative Analysis of Welfare States: An Unfinished Agenda," *Sociological Theory* 27, no. 3 (2009).

<sup>32</sup> Jennifer Hook, "Gender Inequality in the Welfare State: Sex Segregation in Housework, 1965-2003," *American Journal of Sociology* 115, no. 5 (2010).

members of the workforce.<sup>33</sup> My approach, in contrast, develops insights from critical feminist theory to examine the processes through which welfare institutions both reproduce dominant social norms and structures and expose those structures to political challenge. Family policy measures, as I shall argue in Chapter 6, are at once a vital component of an emancipatory family strategy and a displacement of more zero-sum, normative conflicts onto the economic sphere. As I analyze them, welfare institutions form part of the material embodiment of structures of domination—whether of gender, race, or ability—as well as the potential objects of political mobilizations challenging those structures of domination. My hope is that this set of theoretical tools can further our insight into the political interaction between welfare regimes and emancipatory social movements seeking to unravel entrenched structures of domination.

#### A Return to Political Economy: Weber, Arendt, and Habermas

In sum, democratic theory can draw fruitfully on scholarship in comparative political economy for theorizing the relationship between democratic agency and economic structures in the welfare state. At the same time, comparative political economy, much like both the deliberative and radical approaches to the welfare state, rests on an implicit understanding of the welfare state as a structure of instrumental, means-ends calculations, one in which welfare institutions are reduced to mechanisms for managing social and economic risks. Without a doubt,

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<sup>33</sup> For efforts to incorporate gender into the pre-existing scholarly perspectives, see the special edition of *Social Politics* (2009), 16, no. 2 on "How Gender and Class Challenges Varieties of Capitalism"; Gøsta Esping-Andersen, *The Incomplete Revolution: Adapting to Women's New Roles* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009); Margarita Estévez-Abe, "Gender Bias in Skills and Social Policies: The Varieties of Capitalism Perspective on Sex Segregation," *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society* 12, no. 2 (2005); Walter Korpi, Tommy Ferrarini, and Stefan Englund, "Women's Opportunities under Different Family Policy Constellations: Gender, Class, and Inequality Tradeoffs in Western Countries Re-Examined," *Social Politics* 20, no. 1 (2013); Hadas Mandel and Moshe Semyonov, "A Welfare State Paradox: State Interventions and Women's Employment Opportunities in 22 Countries," *American Journal of Sociology* 111, no. 6 (2006); Diane Sainsbury, ed. *Gender and Welfare State Regimes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

the focus on instrumentality and technical calculation as key characteristics of late modern, bureaucratized capitalism provides a valuable diagnostic framework for grasping the pathologies of contemporary societies. Yet, even as it draws attention to important features of current political life, the idea that the modern state and capitalist economy are *reducible* to technical calculation produces a particular image of the possible political responses and of democratic agency more broadly. It generates an image of the welfare state as either the unproblematic realization of universal norms or, conversely, as inevitably transforming the claims of insurgent social movements into objects that can be technically managed and controlled. And the focus on instrumentality and technical calculation leaves democratic theory unable to account for the historical reality that insurgent social movements were able to engage with and participate in welfare institutions so as to augment and further their more fundamental democratic aspirations.

So, the terms of current democratic theory are insufficient for grasping and articulating these modes of democratic engagement. And they are insufficient, in particular, because democratic theorists accept a view of modern capitalism and the contemporary state that reduces both to instrumentality and technical calculation. My overarching theoretical goal is to understand the sources of this view and its persistent influence and to develop an alternative view, one that better captures and articulates the dynamics of democratic participation within the structure of welfare institutions. And I pursue this goal through diagnostic reconstructions of three central efforts to theoretically grasp the significance of the welfare state for democratic politics—those found in the work of Max Weber, Hannah Arendt, and Jürgen Habermas. The tradition of the critique of political economy that runs from Weber to the critical responses of Arendt and Habermas can help us better perceive the democratic facets of the welfare state by providing conceptual tools for grasping political economy as a matter of what I call worldly

mediation. Weber's political thought, I argue, rests on a particular understanding of the relationship among constellation of concepts—value, instrumentality, and domination—that together produce his image of modern political institutions as scenes of technical calculation. In my readings of Arendt and Habermas, I rethink these three concepts. Heidegger and Arendt shows that Weber's understanding of value and instrumentality is parasitic on a more fundamental worldly dimension of our experience of economic activities, experiences in which our instrumental calculations are interwoven with non-technical judgments of the shape of the world. And Habermas provides a view of structures of domination that enables us to see how the materialization and embodiment of domination in welfare state institutions, far from just reproducing those dominant social norms, also opens those structures up to critical challenge. From this perspective, the reduction of economic activities to instrumental control, one arising from Weber's thought, is precisely what needs to be called into question. Together, Arendt and Habermas seek to recover an alternate conception of value, instrumentality, and domination out from Weber's influence, a conception that can identify the possibilities for democratic participation in the welfare state that are obscured by Weber's thought.

While Weber's reformulation of the critique of political economy as a critique of instrumentality provided a necessary and productive corrective to deterministic forms of economic reductionism, it also generates the opposed images of the welfare state that construe it as either the unproblematic imposition of universal norms on economic structures or else the complete instrumentalization of political life by economic imperatives. My first goal, then, in turning to this lineage from Weber is to both reconstruct and challenge these core socio-theoretic assumptions driving current debates about the welfare state. In addition, though, approaching each thinker through the lens of how they conceive of political economy and the relationship

between politics and economics opens up new interpretive insights into both the structure of their thought and the relationships amongst them. Much of the critical force of Arendt and Habermas, for instance, has been lost since both are typically read in terms of their theories of agency (action in Arendt, communication in Habermas), rather than in terms of how each construes the relationship between political institutions and economic forces.

For these three thinkers, but especially Arendt and Habermas, political economy does not refer to universal laws that covertly drive social changes and dynamics or else to a domain of purely instrumental, means-ends rationality; on the contrary, the dominance of such images of the economy are, for them, symptoms of the transformation in how people relate to their own worldly activities in capitalist modernity. Rather, in this tradition, political economy refers to the activities by which people collective constitute a context for their life-narratives through the fabrication of a shared world. Such a worldly context is at once economic—it requires ongoing intervention into nature and the production of material objects—and political, as such objects only constitute a world through their collective reception and negotiation. They enable us to conceptualize the economic in such a way that both focuses on how economic activities are part of broader world-making practices of citizens while also theorizing the central role economic imperatives seem to play in generating social domination, without returning to a totalizing critique of capitalism. In order to get away from the deadlocked debate between deliberative and radical views as well as the economic reductionism of comparative political economy, we need a more fundamental social-theoretic account of the historical conditions of possibility of the welfare state: a critical theory of political economy and the welfare state in terms of worldly practices and mediation.

Weber's groundbreaking analysis of Occidental rationalization provides the backdrop for the debates over the significance of the welfare state. In striking respects, the ambivalence of Weber's own attitude towards the development of Western capitalism mirrors the divides in contemporary democratic theory. On the one hand, Weber saw the development of formal law, the notion of rights, and a rationalized state apparatus for the protection of such rights as an unparalleled historical development in actualizing freedom. On the other hand, his neo-Nietzschean account of rationalization and the inexorable domination of man by man is a central starting point for the radical critique of the welfare state as an intensification of power in modernity. Weber's own political outlook was often torn between these two extremes: at times, he spoke as a sober liberal chastening the enthusiasm of his contemporary political radicals; while at other moments, he was a self-styled prophet of the impending threat of a fully bureaucratized world that would foreclose any possibility of novelty and creative political action. Not surprisingly, then, advocates of both deliberative and radical views of the welfare state identify Weber as an important inspiration for their respective approaches. My engagement with Weber allows me to diagnose what makes these two positions so attractive in framing our understanding of the welfare state. I explore the background commitments against which Weber's political ideals—and thus our contemporary vocabulary for analyzing the welfare state—are intelligible. The continued hold of this social-theoretic scaffolding of Weber's thought that leads contemporary theory to conceive of the social world in terms of immanent and coherent normativity or else pervasive domination.

The following, then, asks, what a recovery of political economy would look like, granting Weber's critique of the methodological foundations of the Marxist approach to political economy. In pursuing this line of thought, I also ask how we can grasp the phenomenon Weber

incisively analyzed—the formation of anonymous, abstracted domination in capitalist societies—without retreating into either a celebration of political leadership or a valorization of extraordinary politics. Arendt’s social phenomenology, as she develops it in *The Human Condition*, provides the beginning of an alternative avenue. Most centrally, Arendt recovers the *meaning* of economic activities—the intervention into nature for human biological survival, the production of durable goods, and the exchange of objects—in such a way that is not vulnerable to a Weberian critique of anthropological essentialism. I start with Arendt’s phenomenological method in relation to Weber’s neo-Kantianism. To get at this point more clearly, I engage first with Heidegger’s decisive critique of the neo-Kantian philosophy of value. Heidegger’s recovery of the everyday world over and against the neo-Kantian notion of value is what opens up Arendt’s alternative account of political economy. Yet Heidegger himself was unable to develop it in this direction because he remained beholden to a critique of the everyday in terms of instrumentality. Most schematically, while Weber wants to claim what distinguished meaningful action from mere behavior is the subjective imposition of meaning (which is intended to avoid anthropological essentialism), Arendt argues meaning always involves a moment of receptivity to others—the meaning of our actions can never be fully determined by our subjective wills, as the nature of those actions are always constituted through the responses of others. This change in conceptualization of meaning as applied to action also allows her to recover the meaningfulness of material interaction with nature—the objects of our production are not inert vehicles for human subjectivity or mere resources that are deployed for the achievement of further ends. Rather, they play a constitutive role in forming the scene of meaningful human action—for Arendt, objects are *sources* of value as well as receptacles. This means that what is at stake in thinking about political economy is not just the distribution of material resources, but also the

ways that objects and their production help to form the built contexts that constitute, for her, part of the human condition. Arendt's distinctive account of the relationship between value and instrumentality thus at once a radical democratic critique of Weber's perspective and a recovery of the meaning of political economy from his social theory of domination. However, I worry that Arendt's own phenomenological method fails to capture the *interplay* between the worldly mediations of the economic and broader structures of social domination. Only by augmenting Arendt's approach with an account of the dynamics of domination can we fully analyze the nature of emancipatory politics in the welfare state. I find one possible avenue in Habermas's conceptualization of capitalist modernization.

Habermas adds to Arendt a *critical theory* of capitalist modernization that incorporates, without economic reductionism, the political pathologies that are distinctive to capitalist societies. More specifically, Habermas provides a vocabulary for critically analyzing the dynamics of domination under the welfare state—dynamics that do not fit neatly either into Arendt's story of reification or more recent neo-republican efforts to revive domination in terms of external control. And part of Habermas's great insight is that an analysis in terms of either direct and personal or indirect and abstract domination is insufficient. Habermas's account of domination focuses on the intersection between what I term direct, structural, and abstract modes of domination. And, moreover, Habermas develops a powerful perspective, not just on the nature of domination, but on the dynamics through which social movements overcome entrenched relations of power, especially those represented by economic forces and institutions. They key concept in his thought, in this regard, is the notion of the causality of fate, which refers to the dialectic movement through which pseudo-natural forms of domination are recognized and dissolved. The causality of fate reflects the peculiar coercion exerted by internalized and

naturalized social relations, a causality that can, through what Habermas calls the dialectic of morality, generate its own overcoming. Although Habermas's model of the causality of fate and the interaction between structural and abstract domination provides, I argue, a productive and powerful account of how struggles over social welfare are also always struggles against domination, he himself abandons this critical framework. And he does so because he, over time, came to accept the Weberian problematic that reformulates the critique of political economy in terms of instrumentality. But by returning to Habermas as a theorist of political economy, rather than rarified communicative reason, I restore to his theory its critical force for analyzing the political dynamics and emancipatory potentials of contemporary struggles over the social.

This reconstruction of Arendt and Habermas's thought opens up a set of questions about welfare institutions that are occluded by Weber's perspective: to what extent welfare institutions present social and economic problems as shared, worldly concerns rather than as matters for technical control and expertise? Do they enable the collective self-organization and democratic agency of subjected groups, calling on them to participate in the definition of needs and problems within the institutions? And under what conditions do struggles over welfare institutions and the social become and augment transformative struggles against domination, thereby overcoming the causality of fate? Political theorists established vocabularies, by construing welfare institutions in terms of their instrumental functions, leave them unable to address these questions. Thinking about welfare institutions in terms of worldly mediators, mediators that potentially restore a worldly dimension to economic activities and forces and open them up to political debate and contestation, enables us to better grasp the opportunities for political engagement and democratic agency that exist within the formation and reproduction of the welfare state.

While these questions are opened up by my readings of Weber, Arendt, and Habermas, they also provide new frameworks for analyzing the concrete history of welfare institutions and struggles over the social. Indeed, established historical narratives about the welfare state are deeply structured by the theoretical architectures we inherit, especially from Weber, and here I turn to examine these histories to reveal the modes of democratic engagement with welfare institutions his thought preemptively forecloses. Thus, presently dominant historical views narrate the welfare state as either the unproblematic unfolding of social rights or else the increasing self-aggrandizement of rationalizing and biopolitical mechanisms of power. The pervasive power of these established narratives, and their debt to Weber, are nowhere more evident than in histories of the German welfare state—the first modern welfare state. I turn to the history of the German welfare state and the broader genealogy of social liberalism, first, to unearth the broader historical and political backdrop for Weber’s political thought. But I also turn to it to reveal and theorize the modes of democratic engagement with welfare institutions that are possible even in quasi-authoritarian contexts. Through their political mobilization in response to Bismarck’s social insurance laws, the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* forged a vision of the social that affirmed welfare institutions as potential sites of worldly engagement and participation, even as it evinced a realistic awareness of Bismarck’s anti-democratic aspirations. In the SPD’s practice, we can see a concrete historical manifestation of the worldly attitude towards economic affairs Arendt theorizes, such as the view that interests are not calculable objects but worldly, tangible things that form spaces of common appearance and judgment. Thus, the practical activities of the SPD can be theoretically reconstructed to further draw out the relationship between democratic agency and participation and a view of welfare institutions as worldly mediators.

If the history of the workers' question calls attention to the fraught relationship between welfare institutions and democracy, the history of feminism draws us the parallel problem of how the politics of social welfare relates to struggles against broader structures of domination—here, most centrally but not exclusively, gender domination. Many feminist theorists worry, quite appropriately that the rise of the welfare state has transformed emancipatory claims for women's freedom into a social discourse that frames those same claims in instrumental terms, in terms of the contribution women can make to society. Furthermore, feminist theorists and activists call attention to the instrumentalizing and depoliticizing work preformed by welfare institutions, which tend to take up the lived needs of subjected groups and render them administratively tractable. Without denying the importance and critical force of these concerns, I argue in the following that, in articulating them, much feminist theory implicitly accepts the Weberian image of the welfare state and of the relationship between democratic agency and institutional form. As a result, contemporary theory lacks a vocabulary for conceptualizing the conditions under which struggles over welfare can contribute to the overcoming of domination, and under what conditions the welfare state enacts a disempowering capture of grass-roots democratic mobilizations. Here, again, I think a reconceptualization of welfare institutions as worldly mediators becomes fruitful. Such a view provides a vocabulary for grasping how welfare institutions can augment emancipatory struggles, even as the welfare state risks entangling political movements in the existing rationalities, imperatives, and discursive structures that support domination. These risks cannot be theorized away. But theory can enable us to have a clearer sense of the sources of those risks and of the political strategies that can best avoid them.

## Overview

To get at the questions animating this project—which focuses on the interplay between our socio-theoretic categories, our historical narratives about the welfare state, and the horizons of practical possibility implicit in contemporary democratic theory—the following combines several registers of political theory. While much of it is taken up with intensive readings of figures like Weber and Habermas, the goal of these readings is not merely historical. Rather, I try to unearth and reconstruct the philosophical and socio-theoretic terms animating their respective thought. And far from self-contained, philosophical edifices, these terms reflect efforts to make sense of our common world and the political events contained within it. Thus, I also turn to the concrete histories that form the political backdrop for our received theories of the welfare state. But here, again, my interest is not just historical: I seek to reconstruct the theoretical visions implicit in the practical activities of political actors engaged in political struggle. My historical research is as much an effort at theory-construction as my more explicitly philosophical chapters. Finally, both these theoretical engagements and historical narratives are animated by a fundamental concern to develop a future-oriented democratic theory of the welfare state. Implicit in my method is a certain view of political judgment and the nature of social transformation: that political action is always oriented by historical exemplars, and that transformation occurs through the repetition of those exemplary models in new contexts, where a different balance of forces is at play. Transformative political action, then, is not just oriented by a rationally reconstructed set of ideals or norms—rather, it draws its substance from the traces of past transformative movements embedded in our current political practices and constellations. As there can be no undetermined leap into new possibilities, transformative political agency must work at the intersection of repetition and context, which presents opportunities for enacting inherited forms and ideals in new, potentially transformative ways. At the same time, we can

diagnostically reconstruct the inherited theoretical vocabularies that leave us blind to these transformative possibilities, instead taking repetition as always *just* the reproduction of the established order.

Chapter 1 examines one such theorist of repetition: Max Weber. Reconstructing the socio-theoretic underpinnings of his thought, I am interested in his influence on subsequent democratic theories of the welfare state. I argue that Weber responds to the emergence of popular-democratic movements focused on welfare institutions by reformulating the critique of political economy as a critique of instrumental rationality and technical calculation. Drawing together Weber's normative theory of personality and value, philosophy of the social sciences, and sociology of domination and religion, I contend that Weber's view is organized by his fundamental distinction between the ordinary and the extraordinary. Even as Weber's thought captures important features of politics in late modernity, his understanding of the ordinary as a scene of instrumentality and technical calculation reduces all social institutions to the repetition and reproduction of domination. By accepting Weber's assumptions, democratic theorists reduce welfare institutions to state mechanisms of mastery and calculation, thereby foreclosing possibilities for popular-democratic engagement with and participation in those institutions.

Chapter 2 then turns to Weber's immediate historical backdrop to recover the forms of democratic engagement with welfare institutions occluded by his thought. In particular, I focus on two competing visions of the social in nineteenth-century Germany: an integrative, liberal vision articulated by thinkers such as Lorenz von Stein, Gustav Schmoller, and Max Weber, and a working-class vision forged in the political struggles of the SPD. I trace the development of social liberalism out of earlier cameralist theories of the state in Germany. I look, in particular, to how the social came to be conceived as an object of state action that could be used to counter

demands for democratization. In contrast, working-class vision, neglected today, developed an approach to welfare institutions that positioned democratization, mass political mobilization, and direct of workers' participation in administration as intrinsic to successful social reform.

Chapters 3 and 4 reconstruct aspects of Martin Heidegger and Hannah Arendt's thought to develop my approach to welfare institutions as worldly mediators—an approach which builds on and better captures the structure of the working-class vision of the social. First, examining Heidegger's critique of the neo-Kantian philosophy of value that animates Weber's thought, I show that Heidegger opens up the possibility of analyzing the non-instrumental aspects of the everyday world. However, Heidegger fails to fully pursue these insights because he reformulates Weber's notion of the ordinary interims of the inherently instrumental structure of everyday discourse. Examining Heidegger's understanding of authenticity, I argue that non-instrumental modes of comportment only emerge through extraordinary forms of repetition that are able to work on an ontological register. Chapter 4 then turns to Arendt to argue that, by drawing Heidegger's notion of worldliness into a political register, she provides compelling resources for analyzing welfare institutions, not as instruments for mastering social risks, but as worldly mediators between economic needs and public action. After critically analyzing why Arendt failed to pursue her own insights, I contend that Arendt's vision of political economy as world-building practices opens up new possibilities for theorizing democratic engagement with welfare institutions.

Through examinations of Habermas's theory of late capitalism and feminist political struggles focused on welfare institutions, Chapters 5 and 6 examine how a view of welfare institutions as worldly mediators can expand understandings of democratic political struggles seeking to overcome domination. Reconstructing Habermas's critique of domination, I argue, in

Chapter 5, that his account of critical self-reflection provides a vital framework for analyzing struggles over welfare as struggles against structural domination. Yet Habermas himself comes to abandon his early account of the causality of fate and the dialectic of morality as useful for analyzing the structure of struggles against domination. I argue that this arises, not because of the philosophical incoherence of those accounts, but because of Habermas's use of modernization theory, which leads him to view modern societies as moving from structural to abstract forms of domination. Finally, Chapter 6 engages with feminist critiques of the welfare state and looks to the practices and political demands of Swedish feminist mobilizations challenging the gender hierarchies inscribed in post-war social policy. These struggles show that even as social politics risk entangling feminist political claims with instrumentalizing discourses about women, welfare institutions are also worldly objects that can constitute spaces of transformative collective action against entrenched relations of domination.

## **Chapter 1. Between Charisma and Domination: Max Weber, Political Economy, and Democracy**

Max Weber stands as one of the most influential diagnosticians of our contemporary political condition. And at the center of his political thinking is the dramatic claim that, as he put it in a letter to his student, Robert Michels, “every thought of abolishing the ‘domination of man by man’ through *any* kind of ‘socialist’ social system or the *most* elaborated form of ‘democracy’” is hopelessly utopian.<sup>1</sup> This chapter reconstructs his thought in order to unearth the underlying socio-theoretic commitments that drive Weber’s pessimistic view of democracy and domination. And I pursue this reconstruction because these assumptions, I will argue, continue to structure conceptions of political agency and horizons of practical possibility in current democratic theories of the welfare state.

While my focus in the following is largely conceptual—abstracted from the political controversies in which Weber directly intervened—it is nonetheless vital to note that, alongside his seminal contributions to historical sociology, social theory, and the methodology of the social sciences, Weber stands as one of the most outstanding representatives of Germany’s bourgeois liberal political tradition. He was centrally preoccupied with the fate of the German nation-state as it confronted the forces of industrialization, democratization, and military rivalries. For Weber, the central question confronting the German state was one of leadership—which class was to take political leadership and responsibility in a context of intense inter-state competition—and his great despair was that the German bourgeois was incapable of such leadership, having been so long subject to the authoritarian manipulations of Bismarck and the economically declining

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Wilhelm Hennis, *Max Weber: Essays in Reconstruction*, trans. Keith Tribe (London: Allen & Unwin, 1988), 246., emphasis in original; cf. Peter Lassman, "The Rule of Man over Man: Politics, Power, and Legitimation," in *The Cambridge Companion to Weber*, ed. Stephen Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000)..

Junkers, who used their privileged political location to avert their economic extinction.<sup>2</sup> His mode of thinking about these issues was indebted to Germany's tradition of historical political economy, to which I return in the next chapter, for which the economic is inseparable from the political and the state had a central role in managing the economy—of course, always in pursuit of the broader interests of the nation-state. Yet more directly than his predecessors, Weber confronted the claims of socialism and the Marxist demand for an emancipatory transformation of capitalist society. And here is where his thought is particularly theoretically powerful—where it continues to form the implicit backdrop for so much contemporary visions of political life. In particular, as I will contend in the following, Weber responds to the socialist vision by reformulating the critique of political economy as a critique of instrumentality, with the domain of economic instrumentality set over and against the ultimate values that provide life with meaning and significance. From this perspective, socialism represents the latest version of a natural law view of the world, one that carries forward the traces of the earlier charismatic rupture that formed the West's implicit cosmology, and yet as a charismatic, value-rational vision one that is bound to run up against the instrumental imperatives of material needs and the structures of domination that, for Weber, the ongoing satisfaction of those needs produce.

While this chapter focuses on reconstructing these aspects of Weber's thought, I turn to him in light of how he is invoked by starkly differing attempts to grasp the implications of the welfare state for democratic theory. One prominent approach seeks to justify the development of

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<sup>2</sup> For discussions of Weber's more directly political views—which roughly break into nationalist-authoritarian versus liberal-pluralist readings of his thought—see David Beetham, *Max Weber and the Theory of Modern Politics*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1985); Richard Bellamy, "Liberalism and Nationalism in the Thought of Max Weber," *History of European Ideas* 14, no. 4 (1992); Sung Ho Kim, "Max Weber's Liberal Nationalism," *History of Political Thought* 23, no. 3 (2002); Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *Max Weber and German Politics, 1890-1920*, trans. Michael Steinberg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

the welfare state by tying it to the presuppositions of democratic legitimacy: welfare entitlements fill out substantively what democratic legitimization entails formally. In this vein, Kevin Olson, “with a nod to Max Weber,” develops a political justification of the welfare state from an immanent analysis of “the formal character of law.”<sup>3</sup> Weber’s own classically liberal anxieties about the deformalization of law under the welfare state notwithstanding, he here stands as a resource for strategies of political justification that are not dependent on any particular, substantive value-perspective. From the opposite direction, Sheldon Wolin chides social democratic advocates of the welfare state for neglecting the “Weberian nature” of state power.<sup>4</sup> Wolin deploys Weber’s analysis of modernity to describe the “peculiar exaggeration of power” characteristic of the welfare state, an analysis that in turn complements Wolin’s influential attempt to theorize democracy as “a moment rather than a form.”<sup>5</sup> Weber’s thought allows Wolin to describe, in a manner liberalism and traditional Marxism are unable to, the self-augmenting nature of rationalized power in modernity and to hold onto the non-subsumable moments of contestation.

What explains the remarkable duality of Weber’s influence, the fact that he can be appropriated for seemingly opposed theoretical and political projects? Here, I argue that an answer to this question can be found by investigating how Weber understands the location of political economy—as a discourse and as a practical reality—in modernity. In turn, I argue that Weber’s approach to political economy needs to be understood in light of his neo-Kantian analysis of personality. This chapter looks to Weber to contribute to the debates about democratic theory and the welfare state sketched above, but it differs from approaches that either relate

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<sup>3</sup> Olson, *Reflexive Democracy: Political Equality and the Welfare State*, 179, 15.

<sup>4</sup> Wolin, “Democracy and the Welfare State: The Political and Theoretical Connections between *Staaträson* and *Wohlfartsstaaträson*,” 175.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 157; “Fugitive Democracy,” 39.

Weber to other political traditions or else try to directly deploy his thought for participatory or radical democratic ends.<sup>6</sup> Rather, I seek to excavate the implicit background commitments—particularly those about the nature of political economy—against which Weber’s political ideals are intelligible. Since his thought serves to structure contemporary debates, that will aid us in getting conceptual traction on the underlying sources of the impasse between formalist proceduralism and anti-formalist valorization of charismatic democratic agency.

In particular, I am interested in the theoretical commitments that make the economy appear as the domain of technical mastery, determinism, and reduction, against which political theorists are concerned to protect either the normative justification of institutional structures or else the potential for insurgent agency. Thus, I diverge from those who argue that Weber’s conception of reason is one-sided or that his elitist and bourgeois commitments bias him against broader forms of democratic participation. Far from arguing that his conception of reason or the political is too *weak*, and so needs to be augmented by a theory of communicative rationality or radical democracy, I am concerned that they are too *strong*, leading him to present subjective autonomy and political action as something utterly heterogeneous to the economic. Insofar as these impasses in democratic theory are to some found in this aspect of Weber’s thought, this approach will aid us thinking about how alternate conceptions of the relationship between subjectivity, the economic, and democratic agency could point beyond such conceptually constraining binaries in contemporary theorizations of the welfare state.

Drawing together Weber’s methodological writings with his sociology of religion and of domination, here I reconstruct the underlying socio-theoretic commitments that drive Weber’s

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<sup>6</sup> For an attempt to harness Weber for participatory democracy, see Peter Breiner, *Max Weber and Democratic Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996). And for an account of Weber’s theory of charisma that attempts to develop it for a radical democratic theory of extraordinary politics, see Andreas Kalyvas, *Democracy and the Politics of the Extraordinary: Max Weber, Carl Schmitt, and Hannah Arendt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

view of democracy and domination. I argue, in particular, that Weber's view of democracy is generated by his understanding of the relationship between "the everyday," " " and "value," a relationship that in turn rests on his distinction between ordinary and extraordinary needs.<sup>7</sup> Personality, I contend, constitutes the normative horizon for Weber's thought. In his view, one becomes a personality by orienting oneself towards ultimate values, and these values arise in response to the extraordinary need for meaning in the face of suffering. Thus, Weber's understanding of personality crucially buttresses his pessimistic account of domination, insofar as personality and value are both sustained in constant tension with the demands of everyday needs and the structures of domination that those needs generate.

The first section of this chapter explores the basic normative commitments that animate Weber's research, commitments he makes especially apparent in his methodological writings. I thus begin by exploring the critical—in the Kantian sense—orientation of Weber's philosophy of the social science. Despite how his positivist appropriators have painted him, Weber is not primarily trying to determine how social scientists can gain objective knowledge about the social world. In short, the positivist use of Weber's thought rests on a distorted reading that effaces his normative concerns. Rather, I argue that Weber is centrally concerned with theoretically and practically securing the possibility of autonomously affirming values, which he takes to be the distinctive basis of human personality. From this perspective, Weber targets the metaphysical and intellectual temptations that, in his estimation, lead humans to evade their own self-determining nature. In particular, in his methodological writings Weber is concerned that political economy is

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<sup>7</sup> For previous efforts to relate Weber's democratic theory to his understanding of personality, see "Max Weber on Democracy: Can the People Have Political Power in Modern States?," *Constellations* 15, no. 1 (2008); Mark Warren, "Max Weber's Liberalism for a Nietzschean World," *American Political Science Review* 82, no. 1 (1988). Shaw goes further than most in identifying the connections between Weber's views of personality, religion, and democracy, she does not examine how Weber's interpretation of Christianity is itself produced by his understanding of value and the ordinary/extraordinary distinction.

the prime secularized but still metaphysical discourse where the burden of autonomously affirming values is evaded in modernity.

While Weber's methodological writings present political economy as playing this role in modernity, they provide little explanation as to why that is the case. In the second section, I focus on *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* to examine Weber's argument for how political economy has become a central locus for this intellectual evasion of autonomy. I read the text not as an account of the origins of capitalism but as a dramatization of the implications of modern political economy for the development of personality. His account is thus both a diagnosis of the historical conditions of possibility of modern political economy and at the same time an attempt to confront his reader with the value-commitments implicit in that economic order. Focusing on the distinction Weber draws between ideal and material needs, I show how Weber strives to construct an account of the emergence of modern political economy that disabuses his reader of any hope of finding immanent normative principles in the economic order. Weber does this, however, by more and more presenting autonomy and the formation of a personality as something that is extraordinary and needs to be secured against the realm of everyday economic activity. Thus, Weber determines that democratic ideals and egalitarian claims are incompatible with the instrumental imperatives of the everyday and the hierarchical relationships demanded by the ongoing satisfaction of everyday needs. And so in order to overcome Weber, democratic theorists must displace both the view that the everyday is primarily a domain of instrumentality as well as the idea that stable institutions inherently render political phenomena predictable and calculable. Only then can democratic theory articulate the possibilities for popular mobilization and judgment within institutional forms of which Weber was deeply skeptical.

#### Value, Personality, and Political Economy in Weber's Philosophy of the Social Sciences

This section and the next examine the foundations of Weber's views as they are expressed in his writings on the basis of the social sciences and, although less explicitly, in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Read together, Weber's methodological writings and his account of the structure of *The Protestant Ethic* emerge as fundamentally concerned with the relationship between personality and value—and, most centrally, with confronting his reader with the burden of forming a personality without metaphysical certainties. While previous commentators have called attention to both the political subtext of Weber's methodological writings and the importance for them of Weber's concept of personality , my reading, by focusing on role played by ultimate values (*letzten Werten*) in constituting personality, discloses the intimate connections between Weber's understanding of personality and his view of domination.<sup>8</sup>

Central to this connection is his distinction between material/ordinary needs and ideal/extraordinary needs. For Weber, humans, as cultural beings, have an ideal need for a meaningful explanation of their activities, and these needs are often in tension with our ordinary need to secure material sustenance. Ultimately, Weber thinks we have an ideal need for systems of meaning that can explain the existence of suffering in the world and provide individuals with a path to overcoming their existential guilt. While he thinks such a need is universal, in Weber's view most people tend to unreflectively accept the inherited meanings of their society. For Weber, though, these inherited meaningful systems originate in movements that enact extraordinary ruptures with everyday activities. The ideal need for meaning thus is an extraordinary need because efforts to fully satisfy it reject our immersion in the everyday in favor

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<sup>8</sup> David Owen and Tracy B. Strong, "Max Weber's Calling to Knowledge and Action," in *Max Weber: The Vocation Lectures*, ed. David Owen and Tracy B. Strong (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2004); Sheldon Wolin, "Max Weber: Legitimation, Method, and the Politics of Theory," *Political Theory* 9, no. 3 (1981).

of an exclusive focus on salvation. Similarly, Weber construes personality as arising through the pursuit of a calling as an end-in-itself, without searching for a guarantee of meaning in the structure of the world. And this leads him, in his dramatization of the burden of forming a personality, to construct an opposition between our instrumental and calculable everyday pursuits within structures of domination and the ultimate values that provide them with meaning—values that arise from and retain a connection to extraordinary ruptures with instituted forms of domination.

After Weber became an editor of the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, he quickly wrote a series of methodological articles attempting to move beyond the conflict between historical and analytic-deductive approaches to economics and the social sciences. The urgency of these essays was also driven by the dispute about value-judgments (*Werturteilsstreit*) within the *Verein für Sozialpolitik* (a socially progressive liberal policy research organization) that pitted Weber against the older generation represented by Gustav Schmoller. The debate eventually culminated in a split in 1909 and the founding, with Weber's support, of the *Deutschen Gesellschaft für Soziologie*. The *Verein* was created as a forum for liberal academics to confront the “Social Question” prompted by new workers class mobilization, and yet Weber thought this project was stifled by the paternalistic tendencies of the earlier generation. Schmoller and his generation’s inability to adequately grasp the values that guided their economic research as values led them, Weber thought, to an unreflective faith in the benign moral power of the Prussian state to overcome emerging social conflicts. The dispute about value judgments was a debate over whether social scientists should use their research to make prescriptive judgments about policy issues. The fact that Weber fought for the value-freedom (*Wertfreiheit*) side in the debate made his thought more easily available for a positivist reading. However, I will argue that the emphasis Weber places on the constitutive role of value-relations (*Wertbeziehung*) in the

generation of social scientific knowledge shows that his concern is not with academics exercising judgment but with how value-disagreements are masked by seemingly scientific concepts and the metaphysical notion that the social sciences could ever form a complete, law-like representation of reality.

By values and value-systems, Weber is thinking of the ultimate, orienting ends the consistent pursuit of which gives an individual what he calls personality (*Persönlichkeit*). “[T]he dignity of a personality,” Weber writes, “is that it espouses certain values to which it relates its life.”<sup>9</sup> Weber worries that if those values are taken as objectively given features of the world rather than as subjective commitments, individuals will see no need to consciously reflect on and affirm them and so will not live a life of “meaning and significance” (O 103). While these values are object-like in the sense that they are historically inherited as part of our cultural world, they are only binding insofar as individuals subjectively take them up by making them the basis of their activities. Weber thought that the policy-oriented research of many members of the *Verein* used concepts that obscured substantive differences of ultimate values. For example, he argued at the 1909 Vienna conference of the *Verein* that the concept of “productivity” transformed problems of “world-shaking importance” into “a technical and economic question” to be solved by specialized disciplines.<sup>10</sup> More fundamentally, though, Weber evidently saw something deeply problematic, from a moral and political point of view, about the inability of his

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<sup>9</sup> Max Weber, "The ‘Objectivity’ of Knowledge in Social Science and Social Policy," in *Collected Methodological Writings*, ed. Hans Henrik Bruun and Sam Whimster (New York: Routledge, 2012), 103. Hereafter cited in text as “O”.

<sup>10</sup> "Intervention in the Discussion on ‘the Productivity of the National Economy’," in *Collected Methodological Writings*, ed. Hans Henrik Bruun and Sam Whimster (New York: Routledge, 2012), 359. Thus, I think Habermas underplays the critical role with regards to personality-formation that Weber saw the social sciences as having, a role that goes beyond the production of technical knowledge about possible means, as well as Weber’s own awareness of the historical conditions of possibility of his view of personality. Jürgen Habermas, "Discussion on Value-Freedom and Objectivity," in *Max Weber and Sociology Today*, ed. Otto Stammer (New York: Harper & Row, 1971).

contemporaries to recognize their own values as subjective values and not as something objectively given in their subjects of study.

For now, I want to set aside the fact-value distinction to focus on this second aspect of Weber's methodological writing: the constitutive role of value-relations in what Weber calls the cultural sciences. Neither a silencing of value-judgments nor a denial of their importance for the construction of empirical knowledge, Weber advances these concepts to clarify the transcendental basis of cultural knowledge, so as to prevent the metaphysical confusion of subjective constructs with objective reality. The emphasis Weber puts on value-relations in constituting the objects of the social sciences shows, as I will argue, that his understanding of the social sciences is more basically oriented towards the importance for personality of recognizing the role that value-commitments play in social scientific research. And, I argue, Weber asserts that political economy has become one of, if not the, prime location where the burden of this fact, and thus of autonomous personality formation, is evaded in modernity.

Weber published "The 'Objectivity' of Knowledge in Social Science and Social Policy" in the *Verein* in 1904. In it, Weber draws extensively on Heinrich Rickert's neo-Kantian understanding of the division between the cultural and the natural sciences. Therefore, so as to see what is distinctive about Weber's view, a brief overview of Rickert's thought is in order. Rickert's neo-Kantian approach held that there was a conceptual difference between the natural sciences, which are governed by a cognitive interest in formulating general laws, and the cultural sciences, which are concerned with explaining historical particularities.<sup>11</sup> While Rickert did not think the distinction between the formation of general laws and the interest in historical particulars strictly mapped onto the natural and what today are called the social sciences, in

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<sup>11</sup> For a fuller discussion, which this brief summary draws on, see Jay A. Ciaffa, *Max Weber and the Problems of Value-Free Social Science: A Critical Examination of the "Werturteilsstreit"* (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 1998).

general, he argued, the natural sciences are concerned with abstract generalization while the cultural sciences are focused on historical specificity. So, cultural scientists will be concerned with Goethe as a historical individual, while geologists will not be concerned with an individual rock. Rickert's approach was distinctively neo-Kantian insomuch as it attempted to deduce this difference between scientific approaches transcendentally. In other words, the difference is not a matter of the nature of the world but rather of the constitutive interests humans bring to their attempts to gain knowledge of the external world. And while the transcendental presupposition of the natural sciences rests on the interest in predicting future events, the transcendental presupposition of the cultural sciences is that, in some way, the historical particularity of, say, Goethe is important to the scientist *as a historical individual*. As a result, Rickert argues that the objects of the cultural sciences are constituted by the values of the researcher in a way that is different from the natural sciences, which, ideally, would develop into complete systems of laws that could exhaustively explain all concrete events.

Deploying Rickert's neo-Kantian framework while altering it in crucial ways that I will discuss, Weber develops a transcendental justification for his critical understanding of the social sciences. Humans, Weber writes, “*are cultural beings*, endowed with the capacity and the will to adopt a deliberate *position* towards the world, and to bestow *meaning* upon it,” and this is “the transcendental presupposition of every *cultural science*” (O 119, emphasis in original). In other words, social scientists cannot choose whether or not to rely on this capacity to bestow meaning; it is unavoidably presupposed by how they go about doing research. Values express the fact that humans can take a stance towards external reality and relate brute facts to complexes of meaning and the realization of ends. Both positivists who argue for the possibility of a law-like description of social reality and his contemporary anti-positivists who sought to subordinate empirical

research to objective principles like the actualization of the state degrade this specifically human capacity for to consciously affirm values.

Weber further accentuates the subjective basis of all knowledge of cultural reality through a critique of attempts to exceed the transcendental limits of such knowledge. Echoing Kant, Weber argues that the great intellectual threat to human autonomy is precisely the metaphysical exaggeration of human capacities. Against the view that the ultimate goal of the social sciences is just an accurate description of external reality, Weber deploys a version of the Kantian distinction between noumena and phenomena: “...as soon as we seek to reflect upon the way in which we encounter life in its immediate aspect, [we see that] it presents an absolute infinite multiplicity of events ‘within’ and ‘outside’ ourselves, [events that] emerge and fade away successively and concurrently” (O 114). Without the constitutive role of human subjectivity , cultural reality is infinitely unknowable. Consequently, Weber emphasizes that individuals only form the infinite manifold of sense-perception into an object of study selecting those aspects that “have significance and importance [for us] *today*” (O 116, emphasis in original). He writes, “the concept of culture is a *value-concept*. Empirical reality becomes ‘culture’ to us because and insofar as we relate it to value ideas. It includes those segments of reality which have become significant to us because of this value-relevance” (O 76, emphasis in original). Crucially, this means that values *constitute* the object of social scientific study rather than just leading the social scientists in the selection of objects of study.<sup>12</sup>

In drawing out these points, Weber wants to compel social-scientific researchers to acknowledge that they have chosen a certain value-position in pursuing their research. This is especially clear in how Weber adapts Rickert’s central claim about the flux of immediate experience. While in Rickert the phenomenological claim about the infinite multiplicity and

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<sup>12</sup> Habermas, "Discussion on Value-Freedom and Objectivity," 61-62.

irrationality of concrete experience is subordinate to a transcendental claim about the unknowability of the world-in-itself, Weber abjures from making the transcendental argument and relies only on the phenomenological one.<sup>13</sup> As a result, the formation of cultural knowledge is dependent, in Weber's view, on an act of will whereby subjective values are deployed to shape the infinite concrete experience of external reality. Rickert, in contrast, insists on the objectivity of the value-concepts through which cultural knowledge is formed.<sup>14</sup>

Similarly, Weber alters Rickert's initial formulation of the role of value-relations in the constitution of social-scientific knowledge: while Rickert argued that the values that guided social-scientific research into particularities ultimately had an objective, transcendental foundation, Weber emphasized the subjective, and so selective, nature of all value-stances. He therefore calls attention, in a way Rickert's analysis does not, to the constitutive relationship between social-scientific research and a particular vision of autonomous personality.<sup>15</sup> The overarching goal of the methodological writings is to critically establish the boundaries of social scientific knowledge so that such knowledge can further, rather than efface, this human capacity to autonomously determine the ultimate ends of social action. For Weber, the pursuit of a

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<sup>13</sup> Ciaffa, *Max Weber and the Problems of Value-Free Social Science*, 40-49.

<sup>14</sup> In this regard, Talcott Parsons' project is closer to Rickert than to Weber. Parsons attempts to develop an objective basis for the value-relations that distinguish between the objects of the various social sciences, such as economics, political science, and sociology, which he thinks makes the social sciences continuous with the natural sciences. While Parsons portrays Weber's unwillingness to take this step as a hangover from German idealism, this should make clear that Weber was in fact breaking with German neo-Kantianism in denying the possibility of objective foundations for the social sciences. Talcott Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1937), 579-639. See also Weber's explicit repudiation of the goals that inform Parsons project at Weber, "The 'Objectivity' of Knowledge in Social Science and Social Policy," 134-35.

<sup>15</sup> Hans Hendrick Bruun and Sam Whimster, "Introduction," in *Max Weber: Collected Methodological Writings*, ed. Hans Hendrick Bruun and Sam Whimster (New York: Routledge, 2012), xviii-xxiii. In the so-called "Nervi Fragment," Weber directly repudiates as metaphysics Rickert's attempt to find objective norms for the selection of the values that guide social-scientific research. Weber, "Handwritten Note from an Envelope with the Imprint 'Schickert's Parc-Hôtel, Nervi,' Marked 'Rickerts 'Werthe'" (Rickert's 'Values')," 413.

presuppositionless description of the social world rests on an evasion of the individual responsibility to form a personality by affirming and sustaining values. In this respect, Weber's argument for the transcendental role of subjective values in giving form to concrete experience further accentuates the importance of personality for social-scientific research: even if they are not fully aware of it, social-scientific researchers ultimately deploy their capacity to affirm values in constituting their objects of study.<sup>16</sup>

Without the transcendental backing, Weber's claim becomes much more about dramatizing the burdens of affirming a value-system, as the infinite manifold of experience gives no support for any practical stances towards the world.<sup>17</sup> Put differently, Weber's claim about the infinite manifold of concrete experience is a product of, rather than a transcendentally justified presupposition for, his understanding of personality. In Rickert's view, the values that constitute the object of social scientific research just are and so it takes no particular subjective effort on the part of the researcher to constitute the object of study, other than avoiding metaphysical mistakes about their own activity. In emphasizing the subjectivity of the value-relations that constitute objects of study, Weber is saying that the social scientists must have a strong personality such that they clearly affirm and sustain over time the particular value-commitments with which they will constitute their object of study.

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Owen and Strong, "Max Weber's Calling to Knowledge and Action.," xxvii; Harvey Goldman, *Politics, Death, and the Devil: Self and Power in Max Weber and Thomas Mann* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 73.

<sup>17</sup> The experience of the social scientist standing before an infinite and inscrutable reality is not unlike the experience of the Puritan standing before an infinitely distant and unknowable God: confronted with an unknowable reality, all the social scientist/Puritan has to rely on is him/herself and his/her value-oriented activities. Further, Weber explicitly opposes his understanding of personality to what he sees as the romantic notion that individuality is to be found in "the vague, indistinct, vegetative 'underground' of personal life...a tangled *infinity* of psychophysical conditions for the development of temperaments and moods." Weber, "Roscher and Knies and the Logical Problems of Historical Economics," 85n2, emphasis added.

As already noted, Weber wrote the “Objectivity” essay as part of his editorial duties for the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, so it is not surprising that he draws extensively on economics for examples and illustrations. However, just as Weber insists that thematic focus of the journal is not merely the collection of economic data but “the *general significance and importance of the social-economic structure of human communities*” (O 67, emphasis in original), so too, I want to argue, does his deployment of examples drawn from economics reflect Weber’s broader diagnosis of the cultural significance of his present moment. Throughout the essay, Weber intimates that political economy has, like early-modern natural law doctrines, collapsed the fact-value distinction by implicitly positing an objective foundation for value-positions. The earlier harmony of a transcendental order has been replaced by the immanent harmonization of interests through market forces. He writes,

What inhibited [the formulation of this distinction] [between facts and values - SK] was initially the idea that economic processes were governed by immutably invariant laws of nature, and, later, the belief that they conformed to an unambiguous evolutionary principle. Consequently, what *ought to be* was seen as coinciding, in the first case, with what immutably *existed*, and, in the second case, with what would inevitably *emerge* (O 101, emphasis in original).

Weber sees this teleological closure of the gap between facts and values as uniting liberal defenders of market fundamentalism, Hegelian advocates of the state as higher level of social harmonization, and certain forms of revolutionary Marxist advocacy for the proletariat.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, Weber is quite careful to praise the usefulness of Marxian categories as ideal-types with “eminent, indeed unique, *heuristic* importance...when they are used for *comparisons* with reality” while nonetheless dangerous if taken as real, “metaphysical” forces or laws (O 132-133,

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. Weber, “‘Objectivity’,” 131-133.

emphasis in original). All currents, he thought, had a tendency to think that their value-commitments were not subjectively chosen but rather ontologically secured by the structure or developmental tendencies of modern political economy.

Weber's emphasis on the constitutive role of value-relations is an attack on the lingering metaphysics *shared* by both historical and analytic-deductive approaches to the study of political economy. According to Weber, both approaches are tempted into a metaphysical stance by thinking both that their theoretical constructs, at least as a regulative ideal, should strive for an accurate reflection of reality and, further, that political economy is in some way the privileged discourse for such social-scientific knowledge. From there, it is only a small step to think that the value-commitments motivating social scientific research are not chosen commitments but rather ontologically grounded in the nature of that described reality. In other words, the hope for a presuppositionless description of external reality is, in fact, an evasion of one's own subjective commitments, a desire, for Weber, to escape to the view from nowhere from one's concrete need to develop and pursue values. As such, Weber argues that only through an awareness of the critical foundations of the knowledge of cultural reality can social science actualize the human capacity to autonomously choose values and become a personality..

For this reason, Weber attempts to reposition economic theory as ideal-typical rather than abstractly descriptive. Contrary to "the fantastic claim" that "the results of theoretical work...could...be used to *deduce quantitatively defined* results...from given real premises," Weber argues that the idealized construct of marginal economics is "a *utopia* obtained by the *theoretical accentuation* of certain elements of reality" (O 123-124, emphasis in original). For Weber, this is not a sign of the immaturity or fallibility of social scientific knowledge, so that, ideally, our theories would allow us to exhaustively determine the outcomes of social processes. It is also not that ideal-types are useful heuristics that allow for more parsimonious explanations.

Rather, Weber makes the deeper claim that the utopian nature of ideal-typical knowledge of social reality is part of the transcendental presupposition of cultural knowledge. Rather than generic concepts that describe economics in general, the analytic-theoretical models of classical political economy and marginal utility theory are one-sided exaggerations of significant features of capitalist political economy. In saying that the constructs of modern political economy are ideal-types, then, Weber seeks to secure, at a conceptual level, the possibility of autonomously affirming the values that determine our interest in political economy in the first place. As Tracy Strong puts it, the ideal-type “compels the acknowledgment of one’s own stance and status and, thus, keeps one from pretending to a transcendence to which one is not entitled.”<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, as we will see in the following section, the ideal-typical constructions of political economy are, in Weber’s hands, reoriented towards disclosing the historical value-constellations that structure the possibility of autonomy and that theories of political economy, in conceiving of their own activity as objective description rather than ideal-typical construction, implicitly rely on while explicitly disavowing.

The question, then, is: what about political economy makes it such an important modern site of the evasion of the responsibility to affirm one’s values? Are there broader historical reasons that Weber thinks he must emphasize so strenuously the importance of the critical basis of the study of political economy in particular? Weber gives only preliminary suggestions in “Objectivity.” In the first place, Weber ties political economy to the general “naturalistic monism” that informed the initial development of the social sciences (O 122). The perception of the problematic character of the values implicit in economic research was obstructed by “the optimistic belief that reality could be rationalized in theory and in practice” (O 122). In this

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<sup>19</sup> Tracy B Strong, *Politics without Vision: Thinking without a Banister in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 123.

description, the inability to perceive the subjective value-positions that animate economic research is part of the more general faith in “natural law and rationalism” from which Weber is trying to break (O 122). The cultural faith in rationalism and the unproblematic nature of the goals of social policy meant that “the practical valuational viewpoint,” taken as objectively given, was tied to the hope inherited from antiquity that policy could deploy scientific knowledge that formed “a monistic knowledge of total reality” (O 122). Weber’s arguably teleological story, then, would be that economics, like all social sciences, inherited these outworn metaphysical assumptions that are now breaking down given the progressive pluralization of viewpoints and increasing sophistication of the social sciences.

However, I think a more complicated account of the location of political economy in modernity and its relationship to personality, one which resists reduction to a teleological modernization story, is contained in Weber’s only apparently simple description of how “social economics” becomes “*a problem* for the social sciences” (O 108-109, emphasis in original). Weber writes, “the basic circumstance that all the phenomena that we describe as belonging to ‘social economics’ ... are bound up with is the following: in our physical existence, *as well as when we satisfy our most ideal needs*, we everywhere find that the external means necessary for those purposes are limited in quantity and *insufficient in quality...*” (O 108, emphasis added). In emphasizing the qualitative difference between needs tied to physical existence and ideal needs, Weber here subtly breaks with his contemporary marginalist economic theorists, who still tended to define needs only in terms of want satisfaction and pleasure.<sup>20</sup> Weber is intimating that, on its own, scarcity is not enough to generate the problematic nature of political economy—the problem also stems from humans’ quest to satisfy ideal needs for which material means are

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<sup>20</sup> On this aspect of Weber’s relationship to marginal economic theory, see Peter Ghosh, “‘Robinson Crusoe’, the *Isolated Economic Man*: Max Weber, Marginal Utility Theory, and the ‘Spirit’ of Capitalism,” *Max Weber Studies* 6 (2006).

qualitatively insufficient. Yet he gives no reasons, in “Objectivity,” for or why this might be the case nor why, indeed, we need to think about ideal needs at all. For an answer to the question of why political economy is such a consequential discourse in modernity, we need to turn to the *Protestant Ethic*. There, it is precisely ideal needs, and not the everyday materialist needs he associates with traditionalism, that Weber will point to as the original source of the capitalist spirit. Thus, in order to understand the significance Weber thinks political economy takes on in modernity, we need to examine how he portrays these ideal needs and their relationship to the spirit of capitalism.

### The Emergence of Political Economy: Personality and the Extraordinary in Weber’s Theory of Capitalism

At the same time that Weber was writing the “Objectivity” essay, he was working on the essays that would become *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. “Objectivity” was published in 1904, in the first issue of the *Archiv* after Weber became one of the editors, and the essay that would become *The Protestant Ethic*—“Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus”—was published the following year, in 1905. Read in light of Weber’s argument in “Objectivity,” I argue we can find in the text an answer to the question of why political economy is such a significant discourse in modernity. The account I think Weber is giving is not just about the progressive breakdown of metaphysical worldviews. Rather, the vision he constructs in *The Protestant Ethic*, I argue in this section, is one where a historically distinct intensification of the rationalization of how individuals relate to their ideal needs threw humans back upon themselves and demanded that they generate their own self-justifications. Simultaneously, the ability to find in economic activity a channel for these ideal needs that could provide a secular justification for one’s worth created a potential substitute for pre-modern transcendental guarantees. That guarantee is then implicitly taken over by modern political economy, a discourse that enables

theorists to evade their own relative value-positions and thus the need to autonomously pursue values. Turning now to *The Protestant Ethic*, I argue that Weber's portrayal of modernity aims to both disclose the value-perspectives that political economy obscures and to dramatize what it entails to truly construct a personality without recourse to metaphysical supports.

At the end of "Objectivity," Weber remarks that, while most social scientists are either fact-obsessed specialists or else grandiose interpreters who disdain facts, the "genuine artistry" of great social science "precisely consists in relating *known* facts to *known* viewpoints but nevertheless creating something new (O 138, emphasis in original). I now turn to examine *The Protestant Ethic* to show how it continues the project Weber announces in 'Objectivity': to reformulate the "historically given value-judgments and ideas" that animate capitalism so as to disclose what it would entail to embrace or renounce them as ultimate values. Such a formulation will enable individuals to become aware "of the ultimate standards of value" which we do not "make explicit" to ourselves (O 103). . And the implicit standards of value Weber is interested in are those of a world where marginal utility is a predictive theoretical framework:

the distinctive historical character of the capitalist epoch, and consequently also the importance of the theory of marginal utility (and of any economic theory of value) for the understanding of that epoch, is rooted in the fact that, under today's conditions of existence, the approximation of reality to the theoretical propositions of [economics] *has continually increased*...It is on this fact of *cultural* history...that the heuristic importance of the theory of marginal utility is based.<sup>21</sup>

In short, Weber makes it clear that the contribution of the essay is not to bring to light previously unknown empirical facts. Rather, he opposes his essay to received interpretations of

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<sup>21</sup> Weber, "The Theory of Marginal Utility and the 'Fundamental Law of Psychophysics,'" 248, emphasis in original.

the *cultural significance* of the emergence of modern capitalism—that is, its significance in relation to values and personality.<sup>22</sup>

This effort, then, introduces a historical dimension into Weber's critical aspirations. It is not sufficient to delineate the transcendental limits of social scientific knowledge. Weber also seeks to disclose the historical conditions of possibility of the value-orientations currently available to self-determining subjects. Weber indicates that this historical effort has two dimensions: the first, to understand the emergence of a world within which something like modern economic theory is descriptively useful; and second, to unearth the implicit value-orientations that make that world possible, so as to critically aid the formation of autonomous personalities in his contemporary capitalist society. However, as Weber's analysis in *The Protestant Ethic* will show, the cultural fact that marginal utility theory is now useful arises, ironically, from an orientation towards ultimate values, one that transcends calculability and material well-being, that cannot be explained within either marginal utility theory or the earlier Enlightenment political economy. This is because the emergence of the capitalist ethos required a practical stance that is, strictly speaking, beyond the considerations of relative gain and loss that concerns marginal utility theory.

Thus, Weber takes it for granted that Protestantism had a consequential influence on the development of capitalism—the real debate, for him, is over the cultural structure of this influence and so of its cultural relevance for those who, unlike the Puritans, are forced to live in a world structured around “the calling” as an absolute end. In this regard, Weber positions his analysis against the tendency of his contemporaries to interpret the “the ‘spirit of labor,’ of ‘progress’...the awakening of which is customarily attributed to Protestantism...in an

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<sup>22</sup> For the failed efforts to construe Weber's thesis as a causal hypothesis, see Gianfranco Poggi, *Calvinism and the Capitalist Spirit: Max Weber's Protestant Ethic* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1983).

‘Enlightenment’ sense.”<sup>23</sup> Indeed, in his last lectures Weber portrays “the optimism of the Enlightenment which believed in the harmony of interests” as the “heir” of Protestantism in the realm of economic ideas . Ironically, then, his contemporaries’s interpretations of the relationship between Protestantism and capitalism already presuppose the value-orientation produced by the Protestant ethic—an instance of how the sediment of past values enables the evasion of personality.<sup>24</sup>

Weber’s imagined interlocutor, then, is not someone who would deny that Protestantism was decisive for the emergence of capitalism but rather someone who thinks that the crucial link between Protestantism and capitalism is to be found in “allegedly more or less materialistic or at least antiascetic ‘worldly happiness’” (PSC 7). And he is concerned to provide an alternate account of this relationship—one that focuses on the “purely *religious* features” of Protestantism (PSC 7)—because he thinks that the notion of a transition from an idealistic to a materialistic set of motivations obscures the ultimate values embedded in a capitalist form of life, instead presenting it as just a structure of material needs. And so in order to draw out the meaning of this transition for those who would take up the burden of forming a personality, Weber emphasizes its ideal-typical character. His notion of the “spirit” of capitalism is “a complex of configurations [*Zusammenhänge*] in historical reality which we consolidate together conceptually from the point of view of their *cultural significance* to form a single whole” (PSC 8, emphasis in original). To trace the spirit of capitalism back to Protestant asceticism is to call attention to one aspect of the intentional, subjective orientations towards value that is a historical condition of possibility of capitalist social relationships.

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<sup>23</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the "Spirit" of Capitalism and Other Writings*, trans. Peter R Baehr and Gordon C Wells (New York: Penguin, 2002), 7, hereafter cited as “PSC”.

<sup>24</sup> *General Economic History* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1981), 369.

Thus, from a broad vantage point, Weber tries to imagine what it entails to construct a social order where marginal utility is accurate so as to enable his readers to confront the value-orientation they are structurally compelled to live out. At the same time, though, *The Protestant Ethic* is itself a story about the nature of personality, with the ascetic discipline of the Puritans dramatizing the sort of practical orientation towards personality formation that follows from the complete refusal either of transcendental fixtures or unreflective immersion in the everyday. In this regard, it is central that *The Protestant Ethic* is organized around a contrast between a traditional ethos and the spirit of capitalism. In Weber's famous description, capitalism is constituted by an ethic, “so familiar to us today and yet in reality far from self-evident,” that says “that *one's duty consists in pursuing one's calling*, and that the individual should have a commitment to his ‘profession’ activity, whatever it may consist of” (PSC 13, emphasis in original). The spirit of capitalism, Weber declares, is “irrational from the point of view of pure eudaemonistic self-interest” (PSC 28): it marks a “reversal...of what we may call the ‘natural’ state of affairs” of traditionalism (PSC 12).<sup>25</sup> Put differently, ordinary or material needs alone cannot generate self-perpetuating accumulation. Primitive accumulation requires precisely that entrepreneurs produce beyond their immediate needs and reinvest their profits.<sup>26</sup>

In short, capitalism simply cannot be about the satisfaction of material wants, which, because of their fixed character, Weber ties to a traditionalist ethos that he takes pains to present as rational. The origins of capitalism must, then, reside in some mode of satisfaction of non-material needs, what Weber also calls ideal needs and which I examine in more depth in my

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<sup>25</sup> In his response to Brenato's criticism that his account is one of rationalization leading to irrationalism, Weber not only concedes but amplifies the point: “This is indeed so. ‘Irrational’ is not something in itself, but rather from a particular ‘rational’ *standpoint*” (PSC 345, emphasis in original).

<sup>26</sup> On this point, see Peter Breiner, "Weber's *Protestant Ethic* as Hypothetical Narrative of Original Accumulation," *Journal of Classical Sociology* 5, no. 1 (2005).

analysis of the extraordinary. And this is brought out in Weber's account of the rationalization of conduct, secular everyday labor (*weltlichen Alltagsarbeit*), and the "extremely effective *psychological premiums [Prämien]* (not economic in character)" that the Puritans received (PSC 349, emphasis in original). It was the fact that they went about satisfying their extraordinary needs in a way that refused all magic, and thus direct contact with transcendence, that led the Puritans to channel their needs (asceticism) into everyday activities (innerworldly). Weber's narrative is that the progressive removal of transcendental guarantees of salvation, driven by Protestant prophetic attacks on the confusion of the sacred and the profane, forced the satisfaction of extraordinary needs into "secular everyday life" (PSC 105). The further the transcendent receded, the more important the everyday became for activities that were nonetheless "neither *of* this word nor *for* it" (PSC 105, emphasis in original).

For instance, Luther's rejection of monastic asceticism as transcendental justification before God led him to bestow a "*religious* significance of secular everyday labor (*weltlichen Alltagsarbeit*)" (PSC 29, emphasis in original). The pursuit of a calling could provide the transcendental assurance that was previously supplied through contact with the sanctity of the monastic orders. Yet, in Weber's account, Luther still had a transcendental promise that one's station was "a special *command* of God" (PSC 31, emphasis in original). In other words, the Lutherans were not thrown back entirely upon their own subjectivity: there was still an "*objective* historical order" that could secure their salvation and leave most ordinary activity oriented towards the routine fulfillment of their ordinary needs (PSC 31, emphasis in original). The Lutherans were not forced to rely entirely on their own ability to lend meaning and value to their existence. They could still find, immanent to their ordinary existence (i.e., their given station of life into which they were born), objective guarantees that satisfied their extraordinary needs and so left their everyday, economic conduct relatively untouched.

It was only with the pure, rational refusal of any contact with the transcendental that the Puritans turned the pursuit of a calling into “an end-in-itself [*Selbstzweck*],” something “wholly transcendent...beyond the ‘happiness’ or the ‘benefit’ of singular individuals” (PSC 12). For the Puritans, there were *no* objective sources of intelligibility or order within the world. They had to create, alone, their own justification before God. As a result, the demands of transcendence—that one approach an activity without any instrumentality or egoism whatsoever—was channeled into the only available source of justification, which was innerworldly activity. And here Weber’s description of the Puritan pursuit of the calling and his own understanding of personality intersect. Recall that Weber’s insisted that social scientists should go about their research in such a way that they methodically foreground the subjective constitution of their topic of study and never confuse their own value-stance for something that is objectively guaranteed. In the same way, the Puritan pursuit of a calling was driven by the attempt to satisfy what Weber takes to be the original question that creates value-systems—what justifies existence in the face of suffering?<sup>27</sup>—without recourse to any extra-subjective supports. The ascetic response to this problem was to rationalize a method of living such that it released the individual “from dependency on the world and nature” and subjected the self “to the supremacy of the purposeful will” (PSC 81). The goal of such methodical conduct, Weber writes, is to turn the Puritan into “a *‘personality’* [SK-emphasis added],” one who “‘creates’ his salvation *himself*” (PSC 81, 79, emphasis in original). In this description, personality is found in the alienation from the immediate world and the pursuit of something that goes beyond the given. It is only once the Puritans rejected magical and transcendental guarantees evident in the everyday that they

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<sup>27</sup> Max Weber, "The Social Psychology of the World Religions," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford, 1946), 267-301. Weber calls the desire for an answer to this question an “ineradicable need” (*unausrottbare Bedürfnis*). Ibid., 275.

oriented themselves entirely towards becoming a personality, someone who methodically subordinates their given, ordinary needs and conduct to a higher purpose.

In its pure form, the Calvinist pursued their calling without any regard to the content of that calling or the consequences of their activities. However, while the ideal-typical Puritan, like Calvin himself, could endure the inability to know where he fit into the God's plan, the psychological burden this placed on "ordinary people" transformed the nature of the pursuit of a non-instrumental purpose (PSC 76). This is where the pursuit of everyday labor as an end-in-itself intersects with the emergence of modern political economy, for the psychological burden placed on non-virtuosos led them to look to the results of their activity within an economic order as an objective and intelligible source of the guarantee that their extraordinary need for salvation would be met. Less rigorous Puritan thinkers such as Baxter argued for "the providential character of the interplay of private economic interests" which "one can recognize...by their fruits," a notion Weber links to "Adam Smith's well-known *apotheosis* [SK – emphasis added] of the division of labor" (PSC 109, emphasis in original). For Puritans who could not bear the full burden of pursuing their calling entirely as an end-in-itself, the objective result of the economic system, such profits, become a providential sign that satisfied their need for an objective justification before God—thereby laying the groundwork for Weber's above-noted critique of the inherited erasure of the gap between values and the world.

It is this core dimension of Weber's argument that leads him to be so concerned with emphasizing the ideal-typical nature of economic theory. Precisely because the domain of ordinary, economic activities is rationalizable and knowable, it became the Puritan substitute for direct contact with the divine. Political economy, then, is not just one discursive domain among many that Weber thinks needs methodological disenchantment. Rather, political economy has a privileged location in Weber's account because the extraordinary need for salvation, which in its

purest form rejects all contact with the world, found in economic activity precisely the purest domain of non-instrumental and non-magical, and so knowable, action. The result is both the creation of a rationally ordered economic cosmos as well as the ability—and temptation—to find in that cosmos some immanent principle of meaning. The rationalization of everyday life creates a world where marginal utility theory becomes a useful theoretical framework—where “one can, in principle, master all things by calculation.”<sup>28</sup> Weber seems to think that these objective and calculable outcomes of market forces are a lure for a secular theodicy which obscures its subjective basis through seemingly technical concepts like productivity and progress. It is in order to disabuse his reader of this temptation that Weber portrays the individual confronting the “mighty cosmos of the modern economic order” whose “overwhelming coercion” determines the minutest details of individual life conduct (PSC 120) as strictly analogous to the experience of the highest Puritan in front of a fully inaccessible God, “remote from any human understanding, a being who had allotted to each individual his destiny according to his entirely unfathomable decree, and who controlled the tiniest detail of the cosmos” (PSC 73). Just as the strict Puritan could find no source of justification in God’s cosmos, so to, Weber seems to be saying, should we give up any hope of finding an immanent source of meaning in the modern economic and administrative cosmos.

In short, it was only when the economic order was enchanted as a source of justification that the Protestant spirit could be sustained by enough non-virtuosos such that it would lead to the development of a capitalist cosmos. Yet it is precisely this enchantment Weber wants to dissolve so as to again compel his readers to confront the burden of constructing a personality with no metaphysical buttresses. Social-scientific research can unearth and bring to the fore the ultimate values embedded in the structures of our everyday activities and experiences. And on

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<sup>28</sup> *The Vocation Lectures*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004), 13.

this basis one can then recognize and affirm those values as ends-in-themselves and thereby pursue those activities such as to become a personality. So, even as Weber's account of personality rests on an opposition between unreflective immersion in the everyday and the achievement of personality, it is vital to note that personality does not exist in complete opposition to or flight from the everyday. The specific content of a calling, such as the vocation of being a scientist or an artist, is always, to an extent, pre-given by the existing routines and structures of various value spheres. Indeed, Weber criticizes, especially in his later writings such as "Science as a Vocation," those who are unable to "meet the challenge of...*everyday life*" and so seek escape into undifferentiated artistic or religious experiences . Thus, as Harvey Goldman emphasizes, a crucial aspect of forming a personality is "submission or devotion to the work or object" . Yet the embrace of a pre-given calling is not itself sufficient. One must also come to recognize the values embedded in the everyday as ultimate values, values that arise in response to our ideal or extraordinary needs, and so to achieve an appropriate distance from one's own calling. Like the strict Calvinist, we must learn to pursue a calling because of a devotion to those ultimate values as ends-in-themselves and not because of the specific content of one's chosen vocation. Only then can one potentially generate the emergence of something extraordinary and new: "inspiration" in science and, more importantly, the charismatic leadership in the political world that can perhaps generate the new values and loyalties that would overcome bureaucratic inertia .<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> For an insightful reading of how Weber's view of personality in politics—responsible leadership—balances commitment to the everyday with an openness to the incalculable, see "Max Weber and the Ethos of Politics Beyond Calculation," *American Political Science Review* 108, no. 01 (2014). I am less sanguine than Satkunanandan, however, that Weber's conception of responsibility can be divorced from his elitist political program. In my reading, Weber's view of everyday norms as instrumentally calculable is precisely what grounds his view that political institutions are inevitably structures of domination—a central tenant informing his political worldview.

I have dealt with these works by Weber not just to reveal the underlying normative impulse animating them. Weber's conception of the relationship between value and personality also crucially illuminates his account of domination, helping to reveal the systematic coherence of his view. Indeed, the central distinction driving Weber's view of personality—between heteronomous acceptance of the everyday and the achievement of personality by recognizing values as ends-in-themselves and acting on that basis—reappears as the structuring thought of Weber's view of domination. Even as it can be achieved within the everyday, Weber's notion of personality presupposes that our mundane activities and routines are characteristically calculable and instrumental, such that we can only confront them properly when we recognize the ultimate values that structure and give meaning to their instrumental routines. Similarly, Weber's view of domination is based on an opposition between everyday needs and the extraordinary needs that find satisfaction through ruptures with existing orders of domination.

Thus, Weber's account of personality and his view of domination are mutually reinforcing: his portrayal of everyday institutions as inherently structured by instrumentality and domination further accentuates the burden of forming a personality and achieving the requisite distance from the everyday. Although the achievement of personality must occur through a negotiation of the demands of the everyday, it also requires taking a distance from the everyday and the affirmation of ultimate values—a distance that is possible because values retain a connection to extraordinary *breaks* with the everyday. Thus, while personality itself can be sustained outside of such moments of extraordinary rupture, the necessary distance from the everyday reflects the lingering traces of the extraordinary in ultimate values—as exemplified in the Calvinist subordination of the everyday to the value of salvation. And, in turn, much of Weber's interpretations of epochal political tendencies, such as the rationalization of domination into bureaucracy or the susceptibility of the masses to demagogic leadership, are deeply informed

by his normative goal of compelling *some* people to take on the task of achieving a personality even in our disenchanted world (cf. Goldman 184-192).

### Autonomy, Domination, and the Extraordinary in *Economy and Society*

So far, I have argued that Weber's methodological writings are animated by the concern with the formation of autonomous personality. While these underlying normative commitments are well known, I also sought to draw attention to central role played by political economy in Weber's understanding of how the burdens of personality formation have been evaded in modernity. Turning to *The Protestant Ethic*, I argued that political economy is not just modern one discourse among many that effaced personality formation but rather the distinctly modern form of secular theodicy. Weber formulates with clarity how the modern political economic cosmos emerges from an attempt to satisfy the ideal need for salvation. The demand for the justification of existence in its purest form generates a situation where ideal needs can only be met through the complete, rational mastery of the material world—the domination of the extraordinary over the ordinary, which is realized as the methodical rationalization of the everyday activity. In contrast to classical political economy, animated by a general faith that the self-regulating order of political economy would lead to a harmonization of egoistic interests and the gradually enculturation of mankind, Weber presents the Nietzschean rejoinder that political economy takes on this role only because of lingering metaphysical traces of Protestant theodicy. In contrast to such secular faiths that identify political economy with the progressive development of mankind's faculties, Weber argues forcefully that the formation of personality requires a transcendence of everyday concerns that characterize political economy, which is inevitably the scene of heteronomy.

In his later work, Weber more fully develops the conceptual linkages, only implicit in *The Protestant Ethic*, between values and extraordinary ruptures with the everyday. In his account of

the interrelated nature of the extraordinary, charisma, and value-rationality, Weber intimates that our capacity to autonomously form a personality is predicated on past, and perhaps future, charismatic movements that proclaim new values through ruptures with the everyday. Here, I examine the fragments collected as *Economy and Society* to show how Weber’s concept of personality and his distinction between ideal and ordinary needs translates into a sociological of domination organized around a fundamental differentiation between “ordinariness” or “everydayness” (*Alltäglichkeit*) and “extraordinariness” (*Außeralltäglichkeit*). Moreover, Weber’s sociology of domination adds a collective dimension to his understanding of personality. From the vantage of his account of domination, the demand to form a personality represents the traces of collective autonomy in an era of legal-rational domination. While he never explicitly theorizes it as such, Weber’s analysis of value-rationality and natural law both point to an ideal of collective autonomy—of political institutions that unite our individual wills with the general will embodied in law. Weber’s account of domination, centered on his distinction between the ordinary and the extraordinary, grounds his rejection of the possibility of collective autonomy in late modernity and his alternate demand for individuals to take on the burden of personality.

It may seem strange to identify autonomy as one of the guiding concerns for Weber in *Economy and Society*. It is, at first glance, Weber’s most cold and “value-free” text, his attempt to construct, as he wrote to his publisher, a “closed sociological theory and account that relates all major forms of community to the economy.”<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, I think that a careful reconstruction of Weber’s core concepts reveals there to be several questions and analytic distinctions that, to a large extent, structure his effort in *Economy and Society*, all of which circle around the question of autonomy. At the core of Weber’s conceptual terrain, I submit, is his tri-

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<sup>30</sup> Quoted in Joachim Radkau, *Max Weber: A Biography* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012), 412.

partite definition of domination—traditional, legal-rational, and charismatic—which in turn are structured around two binaries: ordinary/extra-ordinary and naturalistic/rationalized. For Weber, values are essentially non-instrumental, a quality he associates most deeply with extraordinary charismatic experiences and the satisfaction of what he calls ideal needs—paradigmatically the need for salvation. Instrumentality and domination are thus relegated to domains entirely determined by material needs, which Weber links with traditional and legal-rational domination. Thus, Weber tends to map the division between the ordinary and the extraordinary onto that between autonomy and heteronomy, where autonomy is secured by orienting action towards the values revealed in extra-ordinary ruptures and so is in tension with the heteronomous domain of everyday economic necessity and institutional domination. Thus, contrary to those who find *Economy and Society* eclectic and fragmentary, I contend that it is far from accidental that Weber selects these three modes of legitimating domination as the framework for his general sociological theory. The categories of domination Weber presents in *Economy and Society* provide a general theorization of the historically specific question of the emergence of Western capitalism dealt with in the *Protestant Ethic*: what are the historical conditions of possibility of autonomous personality formation, as Weber understands it, and how do those conditions relate to the structures of everyday life?

While previous commentators have examined the important interrelations between Weber's accounts of personality, charisma, and domination, they have failed to specify the role of the ordinary/extraordinary distinction in generating Weber's pessimistic view of democracy. Though Andreas Kalyvas highlights the extraordinary as a category in Weber, he fails to account for the importance of natural law in the structure of Weber's argument, such that he does not acknowledge that Weber has a well-developed view of “collective self-determination, in the sense of a union of particular wills capable of issuing higher laws” and why it is no longer a

viable political model.<sup>31</sup> Peter Breiner's account more fully addresses this problem and, as do I, points to the mutually constitutive relationship between Weber's analyses of personality and his account of domination. Weber's "typology of legitimate forms of domination and his account of the rationalization of modern politics...are constructed from the vantage point of the very ethic [of personality] they are meant to instantiate," writes Breiner.<sup>32</sup> The following builds on Breiner's insight by drawing attention to the importance of the extraordinary in how Weber constructs his typology of domination in relation to personality and value. The apparent circularity of Weber's argument is dissolved once we see how both his account of domination and his view of personality arise from the idea that ultimate values originate in the demand to satisfy extraordinary needs—and so in charismatic ruptures with instituted orders of domination. For Breiner, the circularity of Weber's argument means that we can divorce his conjunctural analysis of the dynamics of political action in modernity from his normative effort to reinforce an "aristocratic" account of selfhood, such that Weber's ethic of responsibility could buttress a participatory-democratic political orientation.<sup>33</sup> Although I am sympathetic to this effort, Breiner's approach leaves unchallenged the conceptual and practical gulf between ultimate values and the mundane world of instrumental, means-ends calculations—precisely the gulf that grounds both Weber's pessimistic analysis of domination *and* his defense of the ideal of personality.

In my reading, the central problem for understanding Weber's critique of democracy is grasping why he rejects value-rationality as a legitimating basis for stable social orders.<sup>34</sup> While value-rationality is, in Weber's initial sociological categories, one of the four possible grounds

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<sup>31</sup> Kalyvas, *Democracy and the Politics of the Extraordinary*, 69, cf. 65.

<sup>32</sup> Breiner, *Max Weber and Democratic Politics*, 212.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 165, cf. 82-92.

<sup>34</sup> See the discussion in Martin Barker, "Kant as a Problem for Weber," *The British Journal of Sociology* 31, no. 2 (1980).

for the belief in the validity of an order (in addition to affective, traditional, and legal-rational), when it comes to his discussion of legitimate domination, only the latter three of the categories are enumerated as a possible basis for legitimate orders (charismatic, traditional, and rational, respectively). Why does value-rationality fall out? As we will see, it is because value-rationality is actually charisma in its most ethically rigorous and so most extra-ordinary form, whereby it fully answers the extraordinary need for meaning and salvation but is severely opposed to the domain of everyday, material concerns.

In other words, I don't read Weber's theory of legitimacy as merely repurposing evaluative concepts for descriptive ends, with all the attendant confusion that causes, such that we can overcome Weber by restoring the evaluative meaning of such concepts.<sup>35</sup> Rather, I take Weber to be doing something at once more subtle and more fundamental—that is, to deny that sovereign autonomy, either individual or collective, can be reconciled with the structures of the economy in modernity. He excludes value-rationality from the domain of legitimization not only because he denies the cognitive significance of value judgments, but also, and more foundationally, because he denies that value-rational action can ever, in the way thinkers like Rousseau and Kant had hoped, form the basis of sustained social orders that must meet the demands of everyday life. This becomes clear once we see the close connection between natural law, value-rationality and charisma in Weber's sociology of religion.

So, to begin with, Weber defines domination [*Herrschaft*] as “the situation in which the manifested will (*command*) of the *ruler* or rulers is meant to influence the conduct of one or more others (*the ruled*) and actually does influence it in such a way that their conduct to a socially

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<sup>35</sup> David Campbell, "Truth Claims and Value-Freedom in the Treatment of Legitimacy: The Case of Weber," *Journal of Law and Society* 13, no. 2 (1986); Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *Wittgenstein and Justice: On the Significance of Ludwig Wittgenstein for Social and Political Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 283ff.

relevant degree occurs as if the ruled had made the content of the command the maxim of their conduct for its very own sake [*um seiner selbst willen*.]<sup>36</sup> Domination is an instrumental relationship between two wills, a relationship where one will adopts the content of the other, that is maintained by a norm whereby the will of the ruler is taken to be intrinsically valid. Two things are worth noting about this definition: first, Weber does not emphasize the substantive content of the beliefs that ground orders of domination. Rather, his analysis occurs on a more formal level: he is interested in the structures that relate the commands of rulers to the conduct of the ruled. And second, he emphasizes how in relations of domination, the dominated come to act as though the command is an end-in-itself. That is, they act in the exact opposite manner of a personality. And so acting in complete accordance with a structure of domination is the inverse of becoming a personality.

This definition already starts to indicate why value-rationality vanishes from Weber's inventory of domination. In his first discussion of how actors may "ascribe legitimacy to a social order", Weber includes "value-rational belief: valid is that which has been deduced as an absolute" (ES 36). The pure type of legitimacy grounded through this belief is, Weber says, "*natural law*," which consists of the "the sum total of all those norms which are valid independently of, and superior to, any positive law" (ES 37, 867 emphasis in original). Yet, in an ideal-typical order grounded in natural law, rulers and ruled would be in a situation of equality vis-à-vis the dictates of natural law, which emerge not from a particular will but from the "immanent and teleological qualities" of the meaningful universe (ES 867). In other words, legitimate domination and value-rationality operate as something like opposed ends of a

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<sup>36</sup> Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretative Sociology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 946. Hereafter cited in text as "ES". I check this translation against Max Weber, *Wirtschaft Und Gesellschaft: Grundriss Der Verstehenden Soziologie* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1980), and modify where necessary.

continuum in Weber's thought—the belief in the latter entails the denial of the presence of the former (domination/instrumentality) in a given social situation.

This, however, only begins to indicate an answer to the question of why Weber excludes value-rationality from the legitimating grounds for domination. Indeed, the question then becomes why Weber denies it is historically and empirically possible to ground a social order in natural law and thus render domination value-rational.<sup>37</sup> To put the same question more broadly: what entitles him to the claim that domination is an ineradicable feature of social existence? The answer to this question resides in the relationship among Weber's three forms of legitimate domination, which is organized around the distinction between ordinary and extraordinary needs. At the center of his sociology of domination, Weber places three types of social orders and three distinct "claims to legitimacy" (ES 215): traditional domination legitimates itself on the basis of "the sanctity of immemorial traditions" (ES 215), legal-rational on the basis of a system of formal rules that empowers office holders, and charisma on the basis of the extra-ordinary personal qualities of the ruler. Crucially, unlike the possible subject orientations by which actors "ascribe" legitimacy to an order—traditional, affectual, legal, and value-rational—Weber develops these three forms of domination from an external perspective that considers the necessary objective and material conditions of their sustained existence. Put differently, Weber folds into his conceptualizations the problem of how sustained relationships of domination confront the need to materially reproduce society.

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<sup>37</sup> No doubt, part of the answer also has to do with Weber's externalist view that all claims to transcendental legitimacy are metaphysical and so irredeemable under conditions of disenchantment. In his view, the various natural law doctrines of modernity come to the fore "once religious revelation and the authoritarian sacredness of a tradition and its bearers have lost their force" (ES 867). However, Weber is well aware of the continued power of charisma even after disenchantment, and therefore I think the more important consideration is that he positions charisma and value-rationality against the demands of the everyday.

This point becomes clearer once we see the central role that material needs and the demands of the everyday play in Weber's reconstruction of the three forms of legitimate domination. Thus, despite their differences, bureaucracy (legal-rational domination) and patriarchy (traditional domination) are both "structures of everyday life

[*Alltagsgebilde*]...concerned with the satisfaction of recurring, normal everyday needs [*Alltagsbedarfs*]" (ES 1111). In contrast, charisma is the mode of domination characteristic of the satisfaction of "extraordinary needs, i.e., those which go *beyond* the sphere of everyday economic routines [*ökonomischen Alltags*]” (ES 1111, emphasis in original) and so is a form of domination in constant tension with the ongoing demand for material reproduction.<sup>38</sup> Charisma satisfies a different category of needs from traditional and bureaucratic domination: the need for meaning and ultimately for salvation, an answer to the problems posed by theodicy. The logic of the relationship between the forms of domination is thus organized around this distinction between everyday and extraordinary needs. On the one side is legal-rational and patriarchial domination, with the first rationalized and the second traditionalistic; on the other, charisma and (while empirically non-existent) value-rational domination (Figure 1). And, as we will see, charisma, and value-rationality have a privileged location in Weber's account: as that which breaks with the ordinary, it is "the specifically creative revolutionary force of history", the only

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<sup>38</sup> The distinction between ordinary and extraordinary needs also plays an important role in Weber's methodological view. Arguing against the "the optimistic belief that reality could be rationalized in theory and in practice," a belief which Weber finds characteristic of classical liberalism, Weber insists that "in our physical existence, *as well as when we satisfy our most ideal needs*, we everywhere find that the external means necessary for those purposes are limited in quantity and *insufficient in quality...*" Weber, "The 'Objectivity' of Knowledge in Social Science and Social Policy," 122, 08, emphasis added. Social reality can never be subjected to full technical rationalization precisely because of extraordinary needs that are qualitatively different from material needs and thus cannot be satisfied through the technical production of goods. In emphasizing the importance of qualitatively distinct ideal needs, Weber is also breaking with his contemporary marginal utility theorists.

form of domination which, rather than being subject to necessity, “seeks to make material and social conditions according to its revolutionary will” (ES 1116-1117). Furthermore, as we shall see, the charismatic satisfaction of extraordinary needs, once rationalized, provides the ground for value-rational action, which Weber defines as action “determined by a conscious belief in the value for its own sake of some [action]...independently of its prospects of success” (ES 24-25). In Weber’s theory, value-rational action finds its historical basis insofar as charismatic movements provide solutions to the problems posed by the extraordinary need for meaning in the face of suffering. And it is this value-rational subordination of material needs to methodical conduct that, for Weber, is the precondition for autonomy—for forming oneself into a personality.

	Everyday/Ordinary Needs	Extra-Ordinary Needs
Naturalistic	Patriarchal	Charismatic
Rationalized	Bureaucratic (Legal-Rational)	Value-Rational

Figure 1. Forms of Domination in Weber’s Sociology

The important associations between the extraordinary, value-rationality, and autonomy are thrown into high relief by Weber’s description of social orders based on everyday, material needs, a description that positions them as thoroughly heteronomous. In his ideal-typical description of them, Weber repeatedly emphasizes how patriarchal and bureaucratic domination are based on specific modes of economic accumulation. Each is constituted by a distinctive mode of satisfying everyday, material needs. Patriarchy rests on an economic system that is fixed within the limits set by natural needs, while bureaucratic domination is tied to the self-

agrandizing dynamic of capitalist accumulation.<sup>39</sup> Based on “personal relations that are perceived as natural” (ES 1007), patrimonial domination is the form of domination that is least perceived as the product of conscious human effort or will. And central to its logic, according to Weber, are the static material needs of the patrimonial master. Patrimonial domination “is not direct toward monetary acquisition but toward the satisfaction of the master’s wants” (ES 1010, cf. ES 1014). Because the master’s wants are only “quantitatively different from that of his subjects,” the patrimonial ruler can use surplus production to reduce the exploitation of his subjects, a possibility that is absent where there is “a qualitative expansion of needs which is in principle limitless (ES 1011). In sum, patrimonial domination is, in Weber’s description, a mode of satisfying ordinary needs that is in principle delimited by the actual or real biological needs of individuals.

Bureaucracy, the institutional form legitimated through legal-rational means, is, in Weber’s description, opposed to patrimonial domination in every respect save one. Where patrimonial domination is personal, bureaucratic domination is impersonal; where the origins of the traditional norms constraining patrimonial domination are shrouded in mystery, the entire validity of the norms governing bureaucracy consists in the nature of their enactment; where the will of the patrimonial ruler is free unless constrained by tradition, the bureaucrat can only issue a command if it is in conformity with a rational system of norms and thus, in a strict sense, is as much dominated by the abstract order as are the subordinates. At the same time, as we have seen, both bureaucracy and patrimonial domination are instrumentally oriented towards satisfying everyday, material needs. Yet, there is again one crucial difference in their respective foundations in everyday needs, and from this difference flows, in Weber’s account, all the other oppositions

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<sup>39</sup> While for Weber there are partial forms of bureaucracy that exist without capitalism, as in China, his full ideal-typical model is only possible in a capitalist society. Thanks to Dan Luban for raising this concern to me.

enumerated above. While patrimonial domination rests concretely on the fixed needs of the patrimonial ruler and his subordinates, bureaucratic domination is tied abstractly to the, in principle, unlimited drive for capitalist accumulation. “The development of the *money economy* is the presupposition of a modern bureaucracy,” writes Weber (ES 963, emphasis in original; cf. ES 968). The crucial point is that the market economy is characterized by the fact that economic actors do not orient themselves towards “the satisfaction of wants” but towards “estimated profitability by means of calculation” (ES 91, 101). Of course, unlike the satisfaction of material wants, the calculation of profit is in principle unlimited, and in Weber’s famous description of the “mighty cosmos of the modern economic order” in *The Protestant Ethic*, it is precisely this limitless accumulation that gives capitalism its structuring force—Weber’s “overwhelming coercion”—in relation to everyday life conduct (PSC 120). Thus, bureaucracy too rests on a peculiar means of satisfying material, everyday needs. Only now, the material demands of society are satisfied through the rational accumulation of capital, a form of need satisfaction that produces a self-aggrandizing functional logic of profit-seeking that demands a system of domination “whose functioning can be rationally predicted, at least in principle, by virtue of its fixed general norms, just like the expected performance of a machine” (ES 1394).

The fact that patrimonial and bureaucratic domination are both instrumentally oriented towards the satisfaction of everyday needs reveals a further similarity: they are both, in Weber’s account, structures of heteronomy. Again, though, they represent two opposed ideal-typical descriptions of what it means to live in a heteronomous order. At one end, in patrimony, heteronomy consists of direct subjection to the will of another in a context where norms of action are experienced as natural and given. In many ways, patrimonial domination, as resting on the master-slave relationship, is the paradigmatic case of heteronomy, where the ruler expects the unquestioned obedience of those subject to his direct command. At the other end, bureaucratic

heteronomy consists indirect subjection to an impersonal system of rules that, while experienced as enacted, are ultimately followed simply because of the factual circumstances of their enactment rather than because they align with a meaningful or transcendental order. Here, heteronomy is at the same time obscured and intensified, as now even “the typical person in authority...[is] subject to an impersonal order by orienting his actions to it in his own dispositions and commands” (ES 217). However, individuals within a bureaucratic order (ideally typically) do not view themselves as obeying the concrete will of another or working to secure their master and their own happiness. Rather, they obey the command as an end-in-itself, out of a disposition of duty that disregards “personal considerations”, as they owe their obedience to an “impersonal order” (ES 218, 225 cf. ES 959). That is, in a bureaucratic order, individuals recognize themselves as having the capacity to act autonomously, in the Kantian sense—placing their particular will underneath a formally general system of laws. Yet, while acting out of a sense of pure duty, Weber’s bureaucrats are means without ends, subjected to whatever charismatic force imposes values on the bureaucratic structure.

So far, we have seen how Weber folds the question of material reproduction into his account of legitimate domination. Identifying material or everyday needs as the basis of both patrimonial and bureaucratic domination, he presents both as social orders of heteronomy. The question, then, is where autonomy can be located in Weber’s social theory; to find it, we must look to his theory of charisma. Turning to Weber’s account of charisma, we will see that it functions as a contradictory form of domination in Weber’s thought. While charisma often can and does legitimate rule, in its most extreme manifestations it constitutes an orientation towards ultimate values that is strictly the opposite of domination. Weber locates democracy in this space, and so his account of the impossibility of sustaining purely or value-rational social order is also,

implicitly, an attack on the possibility of a democratic social order freed of the rule of man over man.

Weber provides the most sustained treatment of charisma in the “Sociology of Religion” sections of *Economy and Society*. Initially bound up with “everyday purposive conduct” (ES 400), as in the use of magic for instrumental ends, Weber details the development of charisma into religious systems through the removal of charismatic experiences from the realm of the everyday—for instance, through the development of orgiastic cults—and the rationalization of initially undifferentiated charismatic experiences of spiritual forces into relatively systematic theological worldviews. In Weber’s description, the most important transition comes with the moralization of these charismatic experiences. At times of collective existential crisis—Weber’s primary example is the Israelites—charisma acquires a prophetic moralism which interprets a people’s entire fate “as constituting a pattern of ‘world history’” determined, in the Israelite’s case, by their failures to meet “the ineluctable obligation resulting from Yahweh’s promises” (ES 418). Insofar as Weber thinks this represents the most rigorous form of charisma, the prophet constitutes the most important charismatic figure in Weber’s sociology. Furthermore, in the prophet we find Weber’s fullest development of the internal connections between charisma, value-rationality, and natural law.

The prophet, more than any figure in Weber’s sociology, is the autonomous creator of values. The prophet is distinct from the priest because he is answering to “the personal call [*Berufung*]” rather than subordinating his will to “a sacred tradition” (or, for that matter, the calling prescribed by a bureaucratic order), and the prophet differs from the magician because he proclaims “divine revelations” through “doctrines or commandment” (ES 440). The charismatic qualities of the prophet demonstrate that the prophet is providing an authentic path to salvation. But the prophet differs from the traditional charismatic leader by promulgating a doctrine that

provides both a rational, moralized explanation for individual suffering and a path to salvation. In short, the prophet marks the moment when the extraordinary nature of charisma moves from a largely affective experience of extraordinary, ecstatic states to the foundation of systematic value-systems. They provide to their followers “a unified view of the world derived from a consciously meaningful attitude toward life,” one that can provide a “systematic and coherent meaning, to which man’s conduct must be oriented if it is to bring salvation, and after which it must be patterned in an integrally meaningful manner” (ES 450). What the prophet reveals, in short, is natural law—an immanent order to the universe that prescribes value-rational actions in response to the problem of theodicy.<sup>40</sup>

What the prophet reveals, then, is natural law—an immanent order to the universe that can guide action. The prophet marks the transition from affective forms of charisma, forms which are already in tension with all forms of everyday domination, and a value-rational charisma that claims to reveal natural law and give normative guidance in the evaluation of existing institutional structures and that requires a complete subordination of the everyday to value-rational conduct. To understand why Weber thinks that such value-rational legitimization is no longer available, and thus why he excludes it from his typology of domination, I now turn to his discussion of natural law. The meaningful order of prophetic revelation provides a standard by which to evaluate positive or instituted law. Similarly, natural law is “the sum total of all those norms which are valid independently of, and superior to, any positive law” (ES 867). Natural law, Weber argues, is the form that the standards inscribed into the meaningful cosmos take “once religious revelation and the authoritarian sacredness of a tradition and its bearers have lost their force” (ES 867). In other words, natural law provides a value-rational legitimacy for

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<sup>40</sup> A full discussion of Weber’s account of natural law is beyond the scope of this chapter. In his “Sociology of Law”, Weber details how natural law doctrines transform into positivistic doctrines under pressure from working-class claims. Cf. ES 867ff.

domination: according to natural law, an order is legitimate only insofar as it conforms to the immanent, meaningful structure of the universe. As such, the doctrines of natural law point to a possible reconciliation between individual wills and the community—between autonomy and domination—that is ruled out in both patrimonial and legal-rational domination. Why does Weber think value-rationality and natural law are no longer available as sources of legitimacy? Why must we start again, so to speak, with new forms of charismatic domination that can challenge the sclerosis of bureaucracy and tradition?

In a few condense pages of brilliant argumentation, Weber explains the transformation of natural law as a value-rational source of legitimacy into instrumentalized legal-rational domination. In Weber's view, natural law represents the fusion of the substantive—that is, value-rational—and formal—that is, instrumentally rational—elements of law.<sup>41</sup> Natural law found a formal basis in social contract theories which sought to ground the legitimacy of positive law in “a community of economic agreement [*Einverständnisgemeinschaft*] created by the full development of property” (ES 869). While this could be taken as purely formal criteria of legitimacy, Weber perceives that its force rested on substantive beliefs about “the eternal order of nature and logic” (ES 870). However, this fusion of the substantive and the formal in natural law doctrines almost immediately ran up against the problem of class: the formalism was undermined by the need to accept as legitimate “the acquisition of rights which could not be derived from freedom of contract, especially acquisition through inheritance” (ES 870). In other words, the formal structure of contract ran up against the substantive question of how goods were acquired

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<sup>41</sup> For discussions of Weber's often slippery use of the concepts of substantive and formal rationality in his sociology of law, see Stephen M. Feldman, "An Interpretation of Max Weber's Theory of Law: Metaphysics, Economics, and the Iron Cage of Constitutional Law," *Law & Social Inquiry* 16, no. 2 (1991); John P McCormick, *Weber, Habermas and Transformations of the European State: Constitutional, Social, and Supranational Democracy* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 70-125; David M. Trubek, "Max Weber's Tragic Modernism and the Study of Law in Society," *Law & Society Review* 20, no. 4 (1986).

in the first place (and thus the question of divergent class interests), which points towards “socialist theories of the exclusive legitimacy of the acquisition of wealth by one’s own labor” (ES 871). The fusion of substantive and formal in natural law rested, Weber’s argument suggests, on the relatively homogenous interests of the bourgeois, and thus the emergence of working-class demands in the name of natural law inevitably mobilized the substantive elements of bourgeois natural law theories against the formal elements. In a way, we can understand this as a return of natural law to its prophetic origins, as Weber views socialism as largely an “ideological surrogate” for the prophetic faith in salvation, one that provides “a quasi-religious belief in the socialist eschatology” (ES 486, 515, cf. 491-492).<sup>42</sup>

Because of the breakdown of the fiction of unified bourgeois interests, Weber argues that “the conflict between the axioms of substantive and formal natural law is insoluble” such that “the axioms of natural law have lost all capacity to provide the fundamental basis of a legal system” (ES 874). All that is left as a source for legal authority is then the formal aspect of natural law, shorn of all metaphysical dignity. Weber thinks that, as a result of the decline of natural law into class conflict, lawyers and the other members of the legal system increasingly gravitate to legal positivism, the view that legitimacy arises only from the legitimate enactment of the law and the conformity of the legal system to the demands of technical control and prediction—in short, legal-rational legitimacy and bureaucratic domination. Far from standing on the side of justice and a transcendentally meaningful order, lawyers and the law now “take the side of the ‘legitimate’ authoritarian political power that happens to predominate at the given moment” (ES 876).

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<sup>42</sup> Although, importantly, he thinks the quasi-eschatological elements are more pronounced among the intelligentsia than the working-class, and that with the rise of an organized working-class movement intellectuals increasingly turn away from socialism and towards syndicalism as a secularized eschatological doctrine (ES 515). In general, Weber’s view of socialist intellectuals is much harsher than his estimation of the working class.

Natural law can no longer serve to reconcile the individual to domination by inscribing such domination in a meaningful order. In the long run, charisma is routinized and becomes part of the everyday order of heteronomy. Typically, charisma co-exists with patrimonial domination, becoming reabsorbed into the sacred foundations of such naturalized social orders. But when it takes on a moralistic character, as it does with prophetic charisma, the value-rational orientation necessary for salvation overcomes tradition and leads to methodical forms of conduct that, as we know from *The Protestant Ethic*, is Weber's necessary pre-conditions for capitalist accumulation. The implicit theodicy of natural law doctrines, with their promise of autonomy, give way to the perfect heteronomy of modern bureaucratic domination. For this reason, Weber thinks that the only source of autonomy can be a re-emergence of charismatic leadership that can channel the masses away from the tempting but ultimately destructive theologies of socialism and syndicalism, doctrines which, in Weber's view, mistake their origins in charismatic founders going back to the prophetic tradition for objective laws that govern the social world, laws pointing towards an eschatological overcoming of social injustices.<sup>43</sup>

At the base of Weber's notorious defense of charismatic leadership, then, is his view of the relationship between autonomy, the creation of value, and the demands of the everyday. Only the charismatic leader can be autonomous and create value because only the charisma overcomes the everyday. And while Weber no doubt focused on an individual, heroic form of charisma, to insist that charisma also has collective manifestations does not overcome Weber's fundamental antimony between value and political economy. Weber rejects natural law and political economy precisely because both posit an objective source or means of determination for value, an

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<sup>43</sup> Max Weber, "Parliament and Government in Germany under a New Political Order," in *Weber: Political Writings*, ed. Peter Lassman (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994); "Politics as a Vocation," in *The Vocation Lectures*, ed. David Owen and Tracy B. Strong (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004).

objectivity Weber thinks is irreducibly theological. Democratizing charisma by linking it to a theory of radical democracy also maintains Weber's opposition between the instituted world of political economy, a world of repetition and heteronomy, and the charismatic source of the values that steer that domain, values that largely emerge in moments of crisis and rupture. In the end, Weber tends to reduce all values, insofar as they transcend the heteronomous everyday, to answers to metaphysical questions of theodicy and the meaning of the universe. Any attempt to find value amidst the everyday is unavoidably a residue of charismatic and prophetic disclosures of the ultimate significance of the world, a mistaking of the subjective, charismatic origins of value for something objective, natural or given to consciousness. For this reason charisma, alternately dangerous and ineffective, is the most moderns can hope for.

### Conclusion

I have argued that Max Weber's thought is centrally concerned with what it means to self-consciously form a personality in modernity. His methodological writings, in foregrounding the constitutive role of value-relations in the social sciences, force social scientists to acknowledge the role their subjective values play in the practice of social scientific research. Further, in emphasizing the subjective nature of values, Weber also emphasizes that social scientists must become a personality themselves if they are going to have the constant value-orientations necessary to successfully carry out their research. I then argued that Weber claims that political economy has become the primary discourse by which social scientists evade their autonomous nature. In order to see why Weber thought this is the case, I argued we have to turn to his account of the emergence of capitalism in *The Protestant Ethic*. There, he argues that the capitalist breakthrough was only possible because ordinary Puritans were able to find in the outcomes of the economic order a reassurance of their justification before God. Precisely because, once rationalized, the economic cosmos was knowable, it provided immanent but still

metaphysical supports for such Puritans. Thus, through the interplay of ideal needs and material needs, the modern economic cosmos emerged, one that both forces individuals to live a calling while also providing support for secular theodicy. Neither a heated condemnation nor a pessimistic acceptance of that new order, Weber's *The Protestant Ethic* presents his reader with the historically particular value-systems that structure their life conduct so as enable them to decide upon those values and, in doing so, affirm their own autonomy and form a personality.

Max Weber's thought exercises an abiding influence in contemporary democratic theory because it so powerfully captures political experiences that are today familiar: navigating expansive bureaucratic agencies, adjusting our lives to the rationalizing demands of the economy, observing political decision-making from a far remove. For Weber, these mundane experiences reflect the deeper socio-theoretic reality that since all social and political institutions are determined by everyday, calculable needs, they must presuppose and reproduce relations of domination. Yet my concern is that, even as Weber in many respects accurately describes our modern condition, his understanding of the everyday as thoroughly instrumental and calculable blinds us to the mundane yet non-technical judgments that always accompany technical calculation within instituted politics. Especially where state institutions make persistent claims to legal-rational legitimacy and so to having rendered political life calculable, democratic theorists need to be alert to how their theoretical categories reinforce, rather than historicize and challenge, the very things that foreclose more expansive democratic possibilities.

Indeed, my interpretation of Weber allows for a new perspective into the manner in which contemporary democratic theory may inherit and reproduce central aspects of Weber's thought, even as theorists seek to overcome his explicitly elitist political vision. My reading shifts our attention towards how and where democratic theorists locate calculation in political life—that is, to whether conceptions of democratic agency presuppose that everyday, routine politics is

primarily a matter of instrumental and technical calculations. And I worry that much of radical democracy theory accepts Weber's underlying assumption that everyday or normal politics is a domain of calculation; that in order to be stable, political institutions must render concrete phenomenon orderly and predictable; and that democratic agency can be preserved only by turning to moments of unruly popular action that escape and exceed the calculable routines of institutional life. And the persistence of these views arises, in part, because democratic theorists have failed to extricate themselves from Weber's reformulation of the critique of political economy as a critique of instrumentality. Without denying the important disagreements amongst contemporary theories of radical democracy, my contention is that they rest on an implicit social theory and social ontology, one that views everyday economic institutions as structured by instrumental, means-ends rationality.

Thus, while many have rightfully challenged Weber's elitism, positivist account of legitimacy, and Nietzschean disdain for the masses, my argument implies that it is precisely in the domain of theorizing political economy that the structure of Weber's theorization of politics in modernity can be dissolved. However, this needs to be done without lapsing into the metaphysical temptation to again find in political economy some sort of super-subjective guarantee for progressive social transformations. Rather, the problem is one of recovering the significance of economic activity—the ongoing intervention into nature in order to sustain both organic life and a human world—and resisting the reduction of those activities to the everyday and to ordinary, repetitive needs. The problem with capitalism, then, would not be about pure instrumentality structurally severed from the promise of salvation but rather the deformation of those worldly activities such that they are experienced as purely instrumental and, further, that personality is identified with release from contact with the world. This would also entail further consideration of the ontological assumptions that lead Weber to so closely tie together ideal

needs, the desire for salvation, and autonomy. And I will argue that precisely such a perspective is opened by Arendt's development of the idea of worldliness, which I examine in Chapters 3 and 4. Yet I do not want to claim that that view simply stands a competing theoretical edifice to Weber's. Rather, my contention is that a worldly understanding of the economic is already present in and presupposed in the practical engagement of democratic movements with the welfare state. This view of the relationship between the political and the economic enables us to articulate precisely what Weber wants to reject—that political participation in the welfare state, far from reflecting the victory of instrumental everyday needs over charismatic values, could constitute spaces of democratic judgment and action. I turn now to examine such practices of democratic action and participation against the backdrop of German social-liberal aspiration to integrate subordinate populations into the existing order of the German nation-state.

## **Chapter 2. Visions of the Social: Reform and Democracy in Nineteenth-Century Germany**

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Germany witnessed a proliferation of efforts at social reform. At the peak of these endeavors stood Bismarck's widely admired social laws: sickness insurance (1883), industrial accident insurance (1884), and invalidity and old age insurance (1889).<sup>1</sup> These laws were the state complement to a diverse field of reform projects focused on the social. Ranging from responses to juvenile delinquency to public health campaigns to attempts to improve workers' safety and living conditions, these efforts all sought to regulate and control the threatening impacts of Germany's rapid industrialization and urbanization.<sup>2</sup> Most centrally, they sought to respond to the rise of an organized and militant workers' movement radically calling into question the existing social order. Liberal social scientists debated the causes and best responses to the twin threats of "the social question" and "the workers' question." Meanwhile, armies of middle-class volunteers and civil servants implemented a variety of local projects aimed at mitigating the worst forms of poverty, morally improving workers and the poor, and protecting public hygiene. Both Bismarck and these crusading reformers hoped that, through a combination of top-down state reforms, municipal health and welfare campaigns, and volunteer associations focused on moral and cultural education, the workers' movement would be de-radicalized, social disturbances averted, and discontented workers integrated into an imagined moral and national order.

Subsequent historical and theoretical research has tended to confirm this integrative view of the purpose and effects German social reform. As both the first European country to introduce

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<sup>1</sup> For a comprehensive treatment of Bismarck's reforms, see E. P. Hennock, *The Origins of the Welfare State in England and Germany, 1850-1914: Social Policies Compared* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> For an overview of recent research about German reform movements, see See Edward Ross Dickinson, "Not So Scary after All? Reform in Imperial and Weimar Germany," *Central European History* 43, no. 01 (2010): 409.

general social insurance laws and with the largest and most active radical workers' movement of the nineteenth century, Germany's history has become emblematic for later thinking about the relationship between democracy and the welfare state. For some scholars, Germany marks the failure of an authoritarian state to integrate the working class, in contrast to the successful efforts of England and America; for others, German welfare reveals in high relief the inherently disciplinary and rationalizing effects of any attempt to integrate subordinate groups such as workers through state reforms. The first line of research follows Gunter Roth's negative integration thesis.<sup>3</sup> Inspired by Weber—Roth co-edited the English edition of *Economy and Society*—Roth argues that Germany's authoritarian, quasi-feudal social system prevented it from following England in forging a moderate labor-liberal alliance.<sup>4</sup> As a result, the working-class was only negatively integrated into society, forming its own distinctive cultural milieu and defining itself in opposition to the existing social order. Holding up England as an ideal model, scholars have then argued that Bismarck's social state represents a partial, but ultimately failed, attempt to appease the working-class without ultimately integrating them into a liberal, democratic political system.<sup>5</sup> More recently, scholars have sharply challenged this optimistic

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<sup>3</sup> Guenther Roth, *The Social Democrats in Imperial Germany. A Study in Working-Class Isolation and National Integration* (Totowa, NJ: Bedminster Press, 1963).

<sup>4</sup> More broadly, Roth's view fits into the Weberian *Sonderweg* view that Germany's failure to modernize precluded the emergence of a stable parliamentary political system. For the canonical expression, see Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *The German Empire, 1871-1918*, trans. Kim Traynor (Leamington Spa: Berg, 1985). From the perspective of intellectual history, Kloppenberg similarly argues for the basic convergence between left-liberal (or what I call social liberal) views and more moderate socialists. Yet his argument neglects the basic and persistent disagreement over the scope and nature of political democracy, a point I emphasize in the following. James T. Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

<sup>5</sup> Thus, the radicalism of the German working-class movement is foundational for state-centric theories of working-class formation. In these theories, working-class radicalism is caused by the failure to integrate workers into the political system, a failure born of authoritarian and repressive state practices. Much like the *Sonderweg* historians, this approach tacitly posits the American and British democratic systems as successes in responding to the political demands of the organized

evaluation of Germany's reform movements by pointing to the disciplinary effects and biopolitical obsessions of reform and, more radically, to the continuities between bourgeois reform efforts and aspects of the National Socialist regime. Thus, Detlev Peukert, again drawing on Weberian notions of rationalization, argues that reform embodied a utopian modernism that divided the social into more and less valuable subjects, a vision that culminates in the genocidal practices of the Third Reich.<sup>6</sup> On a more directly political level, the regulatory critique of Bismarck's welfare policies views worker participation in social reform as a demobilizing form of administrative capture—neatly inverting the integrative story of Roth. Thus, in the view of George Steinmetz, the eventual embrace of social reform by the German labor movement meant that workers “were helping to run the undemocratic German state rather than attacking it.”<sup>7</sup>

In short, these two images of reform mirror each other—while one bemoans the only partial integration of workers into German society through social reforms, the other sees even incomplete integration as inculcating disciplinary norms of self-monitoring and respectability among workers, thereby moderating their revolutionary zeal and ensnaring them in biopolitical rationalities. For both images, the effect of social reform is normalization and integration—the

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working class. See Seymour Martin Lipset, "Radicalism or Reformism: The Sources of Working-Class Politics," *American Political Science Review* 77, no. 1 (1983); Aristide R. Zolberg, "How Many Exceptionalisms?," in *Working-Class Formation: Nineteenth-Century Patterns in Western Europe and the United States*, ed. Ira Katznelson and Aristide R. Zolberg (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); Gary Marks, Heather AD Mbaye, and Hyung Min Kim, "Radicalism or Reformism? Socialist Parties before World War I," *American Sociological Review* 74, no. 4 (2009).

<sup>6</sup> Detlev J. K. Peukert, "The Genesis of the 'Final Solution' from the Spirit of Science," in *Reevaluating the Third Reich*, ed. Thomas Childers and Jane Caplan (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1993). For helpful overviews of Peukert's work and his influence on German historical research, see David F Crew, "The Pathologies of Modernity: Detlev Peukert on Germany's Twentieth Century," *Social History* 17, no. 2 (1992); Edward Ross Dickinson, "Biopolitics, Fascism, Democracy: Some Reflections on Our Discourse About ‘Modernity’," *Central European History* 37, no. 01 (2004).

<sup>7</sup> Steinmetz, *Regulating the Social: The Welfare State and Local Politics in Imperial Germany*, 127.

only question is whether this is politically salutary or not. At the same time, as Dennis Sweeney notes, both positive and negative evaluations of reform tend “to assume that the construction of the social and the articulation of social pedagogies were part of a unitary process and largely indifferent to party political and ideological formations.”<sup>8</sup> As such, “they ignore how the social in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Germany was not a unitary or unmarked space but rather a complex of sites forged in political-ideological struggles.”<sup>9</sup>

Here, I argue that taking these diverse political struggles seriously challenges the integrative and normalizing view of social reform efforts in this period. Following Sweeney’s call to examine the plurality of political struggles over the nature of social reform, the following reconstructs two distinct and competing visions of the social that crystallized in late-nineteenth-century Germany: first, a social liberal vision articulated by bourgeois social reformers and academics, and, second, a working-class vision forged through practical political struggle. In particular, I argue that the working-class vision rejects the integrative aspirations of social reform by intrinsically tying social demands to demands for political change and democratization. My main goal is to reconstruct the central conceptual assumptions of these two visions as they developed in nineteenth-century German, as well as to examine concrete examples of democratic engagement with social reform welfare institutions practiced by the SPD and the workers’ movement. Insofar as accounts of this historical period have tended to shape contemporary democratic theory, I hope this re-evaluation will also open up new ways of thinking about the relationship between democratic agency and welfare institutions more generally.

I begin with a historical reconstruction of the social liberal vision of the social. Examining its roots in earlier cameralist discourse and focusing on its articulation by two of its most

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<sup>8</sup> Dennis Sweeney, “Reconsidering the Modernity Paradigm: Reform Movements, the Social, and the State in Wilhelmine Germany,” *Social History* 31, no. 4 (2006): 409.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 407.

influential theorists—Lorenz von Stein and Gustav Schmoller—I argue that, for social liberals, reform emerges as an ameliorative response to the more radical democratic demands of the emergent working class. The next two sections then turn to the competing and generally underappreciated working-class vision of the social, one developed more through practical politics than theoretical reflection. In the third section, I examine in general terms the SPD’s response to Bismarck’s social insurance laws and to social reform efforts more generally. I argue that, in contrast to the social liberal discourse, the SPD articulated a vision of reform that positions democratization, mass politics, and workers’ participation as intrinsic to successful reform efforts. And this vision rested on the implicit idea that social welfare institutions, far from hierarchical mechanisms for managing economic needs and social risks, in fact opened those risks and needs up to collective political judgment and potentially transformative action. The vision articulated in the German working-class engagement with the welfare state can become part of the basis, then, for the worldly approach to the welfare state I will develop in the next three chapters, through my engagements with Heidegger, Arendt, and Habermas.

#### Roots of Reform: The German Sciences of State in the Eighteenth Century

German liberalism followed a tortuous path after the abortive 1848 revolution. The revolutionary movement failed both to unify German-speaking principalities into a single nation-state and to impose the norms of constitutional parliamentarianism in the German lands, most importantly Prussia. Instead, Germany was unified under the auspices of Bismarck and military victory, immediately giving the new Reich an authoritarian, quasi-plebiscitary political character. Compelled to choose between their commitment to parliamentary democracy and their commitment to German unification, many liberals elected for the latter—a fact reflected in splintering of the Progressive Party and the formation, in 1867, of the National Liberal Party. At the same time, the social tensions born of Germany’s rapid industrialization confronted

liberalism with an organized working-class who were self-consciously advancing the banner of democratization.

Social liberalism, as I use the term, denotes the specific strain of liberal ideology that emerged in Germany as a response to these tensions. For influential theorists of social reform such as Lorenz von Stein, Gustav Schmoller, and Max Weber, the central problem was to address the social grievances produced by industrialization while rejecting—or strictly curtailing—the demands for self-organization, equal participation, and republican government emerging from the workers' movement.<sup>10</sup> Rather, deliberate social reform could respond to these concerns while preserving a certain degree of autonomous rule by responsible elite—a fact that was true even as these thinkers often rejected the credentials of the established social and political elite. Moreover, the social reformers' hoped to use social reform, not to transform the state, but to empower it, making Germany into a global, imperial power that could rival England. The first portion of this paper traces the intellectual maneuvers by which such theorists could address the demands of previously dominated groups while containing the politicizing and democratizing effects such recognition often entails so as to help reveal the underlying socio-theoretic commitments informing their thought. What conceptions of social reform, society, and the state proved most effective for that project? How could the transformations wrought by industrialization—and especially the formation of a normatively conscious, politically active proletariat—be understood such that they did not threaten the authority of the German state?

To provide their answers to these questions, social liberal theorists could draw on a longer German tradition of thinking about state-initiated social reform. While Germany's late and rapid

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<sup>10</sup> In Christoph Sachße's words, these movements "strove for social reform *without* political democratization." Christoph Sachße, "Social Mothers: The Bourgeois Women's Movement and German Welfare-State Formation, 1890-1929," in *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of the Welfare State*, ed. Seth Koven and Sonya Michel (New York: Routledge, 1993), 139.

industrialization, as well as fragile political unification, pushed the problem of social conflict to the forefront of academic and public debate in the late nineteenth century, the distinctively German integrative understanding of social and economic reform—and especially of the state's role in mediating and overcoming social conflict—has roots in earlier traditions of cameralism and the related discourses of *Oeconomie*- and *Polizei-Wissenschaft*. These discourses emerged directly out of the administrative needs of the early modern state. The *Kammer* was the administrative palace or chambers of the prince, and *Cameralwissenschaften* was, quite literally, the study of the good management of the prince's domain. Encouraged as part of the state-building and rationalizing ambitions of eighteenth-century Central European monarchs, cameralist writers sought to impart the proper principles and techniques of state management to university-trained administrators and advisors.<sup>11</sup> These more self-consciously academic cameralists of the eighteenth century drew on two strains of seventeenth-century thought: first, Christian-Aristotelian political thought that examined economic management from the perspective of the monarchical principle and the divine right of kings; and second, *Hausväterliteratur*, geared towards nobility-farmers, that focused on technical advice about building construction, farming, husbandry, meteorology, and astrology. Both these traditions figured the ruler as a *Hausvater*, paternalistically ensuring the happiness of his subjects. Thus, the early cameralist Wilhelm von Schröder, in his *Fürstliche Schatz- und Rent-Kammer* (1686), writes, “a prince is really like a father (*Hausvater*), and his subjects are, insofar as they have to be governed, his children...Now a husbandman (*Hausvater*) has to manure and plough his fields, if he wants something to reap . . . So a prince must first assist his subjects in their sustenance if he

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<sup>11</sup> For this broader context, see Marc Raeff, "The Well-Ordered Police State and the Development of Modernity in Seventeenth-and Eighteenth-Century Europe: An Attempt at a Comparative Approach," *The American Historical Review* 80, no. 5 (1975).

wishes to take something from them.”<sup>12</sup> However, Schröder, much like other early cameralist writers, focused much more on the ideal basis and ends of such paternalistic rule—especially seeking to show that the power of the prince depended on the prosperity of his subjects—than on the technical details of the governance of early modern monarchies.

Tasked with training new administrators, cameralist professors sought to transcend the monarchist exhortations of writers like Schröder and produce a theoretical science for the practical tasks of administration. In the hands of the most influential cameralist writer, Heinrich Gottlob von Justi, this systematization marks the transition from *Cameralwissenschaften* to *Staatwissenschaften*. In his textbooks on the sciences of state (*Staatwissenschaften*), Justi constrains *Cameralwissenschaft* to the study of the proper acquisition and use of government revenue (fiscal and tax policy), and he places alongside it the broader domains of *oeconomische Wissenschaft* and *Policeywissenschaft*. The former is the study of the economic activities of individual citizens and the latter the study of all public regulations and institutions that promote public order and the collective good (*Polizei*). All these sciences are grounded in what Justi calls the political metaphysics of the state. Drawing on a voluntarist understanding of natural law, one which positions natural instincts (*natürliche Triebe*) rather than reason as the foundation of the social order, he argues that the essence of the state is the promotion of happiness (*Glückseligkeit*), which constitutes the “guiding principle” to which all state laws and regulations must “constantly refer.”<sup>13</sup> Starting from this principle, Justi advocates a strong and active

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<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Keith Tribe, *Governing Economy: The Reformation of German Economic Discourse, 1750-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 19.

<sup>13</sup> J.H.G. von Justi, *Natur Und Wesen Der Staaten Als Die Quelle Aller Regierungswissenschaften Und Gesetze* (Mitau: W. A. Steidel und Compagnie, 1771), §42; cf. the discussion in Hans-Christoph Schmidt am Busch, “Cameralism as ‘Political Metaphysics’: Human Nature, the State, and Natural Law in the Thought of Johann Heinrich Gottlob Von Justi,” *The European Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 16, no. 3 (2009): 418ff.

monarchical executive complemented by a meritocratic administrative cadre that together would render the orderly state “a machine that runs on its own.”<sup>14</sup>

Cameralism is typically viewed in terms of the early emergence of the German sciences of state, which both propelled and legitimated the statist and rationalizing aspirations of enlightened absolutist leaders. More broadly, though, cameralist writers established a powerful post-theological rationale for benevolent administration and regulation. Advancing the monarchical principle based on a fundamental harmony of interests between rulers and subjects, cameralists laid the groundwork for what Hans-Ulrich Wehler aptly dubs “the Utopia of a society free of conflict,” an ideal which strongly influenced the self-understanding of post-unification German social liberals and reformers.<sup>15</sup> And while, contrary to later critics, the cameralists surely did recognize immanent limits to state power and a domain of negative freedom, the empiricist and voluntarist orientation of writers like Justi, exemplified by his foundational conception of happiness, opened up a broad domain of possible state intervention to secure such well-being. Thus, Justi’s concept of happiness at once secured a principle of intelligibility for the human world—through reflection on human instincts and drives the cameralist could discover universal patterns of human behavior and so provide the state with principles for securing the happiness of its subjects—as well a normative basis for state action, still imagined in terms of a household master tending for the well-being of his subjects.

Nevertheless, the cameralist writers moved within a conceptually static universe. This is evident not only in Justi’s stoic notion of happiness, which positions stability and predictability as the end of state policy, but also and more broadly in the cameralist use of the concept civil

<sup>14</sup> J.H.G von Justi, *Der Grundriß Einer Guten Regierung* (Frankfurt und Leipzig: Johann Gottlieb Garbe, 1759); For this aspect of Justi's thought, see Ere Pertti Nokkala, "The Machine of State in Germany: The Case of Johann Heinrich Gottlob Von Justi (1717-1771)," *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 5, no. 1 (2009).

<sup>15</sup> Wehler, *The German Empire, 1871-1918*, 130.

society. For Justi, civil society (*Bürgerliche Gesellschaft*) is conceptually interchangeable with the state: both refer to a condition of peaceful interaction established through good governance and laws, a condition conducive to security and stability.<sup>16</sup> As a result, cameralists discourse focuses on exhaustively categorizing the ideally fixed tasks of political and economic rule. The breakdown and transformation of the static intellectual universe of the cameralists was a long and multifaceted process, but two factors were particularly important: first, the impact of Scottish political economy and Adam Smith, filtered in Germany through Kant and Hegel; and second, the revolutionary upheavals that shook Europe after the French Revolution, but especially the failed 1848 revolutions in Germany and the emergence of a revolutionary labor movement challenging both the power of the state and the emancipatory credentials of German liberalism. Both these events compelled German state theorists to reckon with society as a domain with its own intrinsic, often dangerous, dynamics.<sup>17</sup>

#### Reform Against Democracy: Lorenz von Stein and Gustav Schmoller

Lorenz von Stein stands as perhaps the most theoretically incisive representative of this new effort. Philosophically indebted to Hegel, but also a keen observer of political events, Stein sought to develop a vision of stabilizing, state-led social reform adequate to the epochal transformations of the European social order. Most notably for our purposes, Stein sought to grasp, in their own terms, the historical dynamics behind the emergence of the social as a field of state governance while divorcing social reform as much as possible from the question of political

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<sup>16</sup> Tribe, *Governing Economy: The Reformation of German Economic Discourse, 1750-1840*, 28.

<sup>17</sup> As David Lindenfeld puts it, the “recognition of society was a reformulation...of something the scientists of state had long since known: the limits of state control over the autonomous activities of individuals and groups. Now, however, the groups were more than merely autonomous—they were menacing. Given the hopes and fears that were associated with the term *society*, a scientific approach was all the more necessary.” David F. Lindenfeld, *The Practical Imagination: The German Sciences of State in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 181.

form and democratization. Stein's thought thus provides crucial insight into how the social liberal vision of the social imagines social conflict such as to turn it into the potential object of reformist state pacification and stabilization.

The illegitimate son of a Danish nobleman, Stein initially pursued a military career but was able to follow an academic path when he revealed his true heritage to the King of Denmark, who then supported Stein's university studies.<sup>18</sup> When he was twenty-six, he travelled to Paris to continue his research, where he was reportedly also a Prussian secret agent sent to monitor exiled German socialists.<sup>19</sup> Yet Stein became supportive to the burgeoning working-class movement, writing for radical newspapers such as Marx's *Rheinische Zeitung* and eventually producing his first work, *Der Socialismus und Communismus des heutigen Frankreich* (1842), a sympathetic study of French radical thought. His views became more conservative following the failed 1848 revolutions, and by the time he republished his work in a three-volume expanded edition, now titled *Die Geschichte der sozialen Bewegungen in Frankreich von 1789 bis auf unsere Tage* (1850), Stein evinced deep skepticism about the possible realization of the working-class' democratic demands.<sup>20</sup> Instead, he embraced a program of state-led social reform as the solution to social question.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Kaethe Mengelberg, "Lorenz Von Stein, His Life and Work," in *The History of the Social Movement in France, 1789-1850* (Totowa, New Jersey: Bedminster Press, 1964), 3.

<sup>19</sup> Lindenfeld, *The Practical Imagination: The German Sciences of State in the Nineteenth Century*, 148-49.

<sup>20</sup> Quotations are from Lorenz von Stein, *The History of the Social Movement in France, 1789-1850*, trans. Kaethe Mengelberg (Totowa, New Jersey: Bedminster Press, 1964), hereafter cited in text as 'History'.

<sup>21</sup> Only later, when intensifying class conflict and economic depressions of the 1870s discredited laissez-faire doctrine in Germany, did the sort of views Stein developed gain widespread acceptance and practical import. As David Blackbourn notes, "By the end of the [nineteenth] century bourgeois aspirations were more defensive on the whole. As the belief in self-regulating harmony in society declined, so the willingness to turn to the neutralizing role of the state above society grew accordingly." David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German*

The starting point of Stein's thought is the concept of personality (*Persönlichkeit*) and the inherent tension between the idea of the state and the idea of society that arises from personality's practical realization. Personality is Stein's general concept for the development of the individual's intrinsic moral and cultural potential, and he posits the full realization of personality as the purpose of human society. However, since the realization of personality requires "control of the external circumstances of existence" ('History', 44), it cannot be achieved in isolation, and so the concept of personality presupposes that of community. State and society then represent the two sides—one ideal, the other material—of communal life. The state embodies the ideal, self-determining aspect of community: namely, the fact that a human community is not just an arbitrary multitude but also a self-determining entity with a general will of its own ('History', 44-45, 52-54). Society, in contrast, represents the fact that the development of the individual personality is dependent on the liberation from material necessity through labor ('History', 45-46, 55).

Centrally, Stein argues, while through the state diverse individual wills can, at least ideally, be brought into harmony, society is inherently and inevitably an order of domination founded on unequal forms of property ownership: "The existence of a ruling and a dependent class is the most general and unalterable fact in any society" ('History', 57).<sup>22</sup> The principle of

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*History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 249.

<sup>22</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly, those who find Stein a useful theorist of the welfare state downplay this aspect of his thought, if they address it at all. For instances, see Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde, "Lorenz Von Stein as Theorist of the Movement of State and Society Towards the Welfare State," in *State, Society and Liberty: Studies in Political Theory and Constitutional Law* (New York: Berg, 1991); Franz-Xaver Kaufmann, *Thinking About Social Policy: The German Tradition* (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 2013), 33-36; Eckart Pankoke, "'Personality' as a Principle of Individual and Institutional Development: Lorenz Von Stein's Institutional Theory of a 'Labour-Society,'" in *The Theory of the Ethical Economy in the Historical School: Wilhelm Roscher, Lorenz Von Stein, Gustav Schmoller, Wilhelm Dilthey and Contemporary Theory*, ed. Peter Koslowski (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 1995).

collective freedom embodied in the state is inherently abstract; only the hierarchical relationships characteristic of society give political community concrete order. Periods of revolutionary change, when it seems that the republican ideal of political equality can be realized, are actually only periods of flux when an old social order of domination is dying and a new emerging. Stein terms “social movements” such transitions between political orders driven by changes in the structure of domination in society.

Analyzing the revolutions of 1789 and 1848, Stein argues that European society was undergoing precisely such a transition from a feudal to an acquisitive and finally an industrial social order. While in feudal society property ownership, and so class domination, is determined by inherited privileges, the acquisitive society grounds property ownership in free labor, a principle expressed through the notion of equality before the law. Yet the acquisitive society is, in Stein’s view, largely a negative reaction against the status hierarchies of feudal society. The principle of equality before the law, as “essentially a negative principle,” cannot provide a positive social content to replace feudal status hierarchies: as “the negation of privileges as well as of subordination,” equality before the law is “incapable of establishing a social structure [of domination]… although such structure is indispensable to the human community” (*‘History’*, 211). Such content is provided only when property ownership itself, now in the form of capital rather than inherited privilege, “establishes an element of bondage” through the formation of a class of property-owners and a “a class without capital and without a chance to ever acquire it”: the working class (*‘History’*, 256). While the acquisitive society grounds abstract equality in the formal possibility that anyone could acquire property, in industrial society, where competition among capitalists pushes wages to a subsistence level, there is no real possibility of workers accumulating capital, no matter how diligent and thrifty. Stein thinks this founds the social

hierarchy of industrial society and so gives it its distinctive political form—parliamentary government with a restricted property franchise.

The tension between the concept of the state—which holds out the promise of political equality—and the necessary domination of capital-owners over workers gives rise to a new social movement, now defined as the conflict between restricted bourgeois democracy and the working-class demand for the abolition of private capital ownership. In particular, the working-class political movement attacks the political foundation of the domination of capital—property restrictions on the franchise—in the hopes that universal suffrage will lead to a material realization of equality through the redistribution and eventually complete socialization of capital. Property-owners, recognizing the threat, quite willingly abandon democracy and turn to dictatorship to defend their interests, as in the French July monarchy. Crucially, Stein's presents both the bourgeois turn to dictatorship and the working class' demand for universal suffrage on equal footing: both are, strictly speaking, incidental to the pursuit of their underlying social interest in property ownership. Under such circumstances, “popular sovereignty becomes only an empty phrase for whichever class is excluded from power” (*History*, 361). The true meaning of popular sovereignty can only be restored through a restoration of the “idea of the state” as “personified by an institution which stands above all interests”: “the monarchy of social reform” (*History*, 254, 320).

Stein's vision of state-initiated social reform rests on two pillars: first, that the concept of the state can achieve reality through the figure of a monarchy that protects social domination even as it has an interest in a limited alliance with the dependent classes; and second, that capital and labor share a common interest in social reform. In the struggle between the monarchy and the ruling classes, the monarchy's best hope is to ally itself with the lower classes. “It is the purpose of monarchy to oppose the will and the natural tendencies of the ruling class, in order to support

the lower class, which has so far been socially and politically subjugated, and that it use the supreme power of the state to this effect,” Stein writes (*‘History’*, 320). As a result, Stein sees the monarchy as best suited to carry out a program of social reform that would address the economic grievances of the dominated classes—most importantly efforts to provide workers with a small share of capital and with education. Indeed, as social reform is a response to societal demands, the question of political reform is largely irrelevant: social reform is “equally possible under a monarchy, a dictatorship, an aristocracy, and a democracy” (*‘History’*, 366-367). This is because the social basis of social reform is the “solidarity of interests” between workers and capitalists (*‘History’*, 365). While competing, individual capitalists must seek to keep wages as low as possible, “the general interest of capital” resides in educating the working-class and providing them the opportunity to acquire small amounts of capital.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, workers only see capital as a class adversary because of the competition among capitalists: if the state advances the general interests of capital that capitalists cannot, workers, now recognizing their well-being depends on investment and the future profitability of capital, would be reconciled with their employers and the state. With the “natural social harmony” restored through such reform, “a new social order,” Stein hopes, can be created (*‘History’*, 365).

Stein’s ideas had a limited direct impact during his life. Forced to leave the University of Kiel because of his support for Schleswig-Holstein’s bid for independence from Denmark, but blacklisted in Prussia because of his criticism of their actions during the crisis, he eventually took up a position at the University of Vienna, where he exerted a modest influence on Austrian politics. Yet his general orientation would prove decisive in Prussia, where they were filtered into both elite and popular discourse through the efforts of Gustav Schmoller, the most influential

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<sup>23</sup> “Since capital earnings are dependent on the quality of labor, it is in the highest interest of capital to contribute to a higher quality of labor” (*‘History’*, 363).

member of the German historical school of economics, as well as through the *Verein für Sozialpolitik*, which Schmoller was instrumental in founding. And although Schmoller's direct influence on Bismarck was small as compared to archconservative political thinkers like Hermann Wagener, Schmoller was well connected with more liberal Protestant members of the German government, most notably Interior Minister Theodor Lohmann, who strongly influenced the course of German social policy.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, this direct, behind-the-scenes approach fit quite well with Schmoller's skepticism towards popular political mobilization and his firm belief in the objectivity of the monarchical bureaucracy. Nonetheless, Schmoller proved quite willing to agitate on behalf, not only of Bismarck's social reforms and even for increased acceptance of the self-organization of the working class, but also the more ardently statist and imperialist aspects of government policy during the late nineteenth century: government monopolies, higher tariffs, colonial acquisition, and eventually the disastrous push to expand the German navy.<sup>25</sup> In short, Schmoller exemplified the somewhat eclectic combination of German state-building and imperial self-assertion, moral concern for the plight of workers, faith in an independent administrative structure, and empiricist skepticism towards dogmatic laissez-faire doctrines that formed the intellectual scaffolding of social liberalism.

Theoretically, Schmoller advances a more historically-and-empirically-inflected version of the social reform ideals of Stein. While Schmoller praises Stein as "one of the most meritorious German state-theorists of the present" and the "father of contemporary social politics", he nonetheless cautions against what he sees as Stein's over-reliance on a theoretical and abstract teleological method, which only examines concrete phenomena only "in connection

<sup>24</sup> For Schmoller's political influence, see Erik Grimmer-Solem, *The Rise of Historical Economics and Social Reform in Germany, 1864-1894* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>25</sup> "Imperialist Socialism of the Chair: Gustav Schmoller and German Weltpolitik, 1897–1905," in *Wilhelminism and Its Legacies: German Modernities, Imperialism, and the Meanings of Reform, 1890-1930*, ed. Geof Eley and James Retallack (2003).

to the harmony of the whole or the historical development of its function.”<sup>26</sup> In Schmoller’s programmatic view, Stein’s emphatically normative approach must be supplemented by comprehensive research into the historical formation of economic institutions, research that would also consider the normative ideals embodied in such institutions, especially in wider societal customs and legal regimes that determine the structure of those institutions.<sup>27</sup> The basis of social reform cannot then, as per Stein, be a highly idealized vision of the development of personality; rather, it must reflect the cultural values and standards of judgment of a particular historical people. “Every period has prevailing conventional standards of valuation for human qualities and deeds, virtues and vices...These conventional standards of valuation are more or less the starting-point of every judgment of justice,” writes Schmoller.<sup>28</sup> And insofar as every organized economic undertaking also constitutes a “moral community,” Schmoller calls for the harmonization of “the complexes of rules of morals and rights which govern groups of men who live and work together...with those ideal conceptions of justice which on the basis of our moral and religious conceptions are prevalent to-day.”<sup>29</sup>

Schmoller’s historicist reformulation of the basis of reform opens up a broader vision of social politics. In contrast to Stein’s narrow focus on the acquisition of small amounts of property, Schmoller believes that “the life and the customs, the education and the pleasures, the child-rearing and the morality of the lower classes all stand badly, very badly, in need of

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<sup>26</sup> Gustav Schmoller, "Lorenz Stein," *Preußische Jahrbücher* XIX (1867): 246, 61, 60.

<sup>27</sup> For an overview of Schmoller’s research program, see Heino Heinrich Nau, "Gustav Schmoller's Historico-Ethical Political Economy: Ethics, Politics and Economics in the Younger German Historical School, 1860-1917," *European Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 7, no. 4 (2000).

<sup>28</sup> Gustav Schmoller, Ernst L von Halle, and Carl L Schutz, "The Idea of Justice in Political Economy," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 4 (1894): 13, 35.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 731.

reform.”<sup>30</sup> Yet this broader vision also brings with it a more pronounced focus on integrating dependent classes into both the shared values of a historical community and into the global power struggle on which the survival of those values supposedly depends. Thus, for Schmoller, one of the key impediments to social reform is “the fact that up to the present time the Social Democracy [sic] completely neglected the specifically national demands which were proposed in the interest of the power of the state and of the nation.”<sup>31</sup> Similarly, even as Schmoller shares Stein’s strong faith in a monarchical state standing above society, he develops this thought into a more broad-ranging belief in the political necessity of hierarchical relations in all social domains. A key task of social reform, then, is to encourage the “political and occupational organization of laborers” so as “to give them a chance to have leaders of their own organization, whom they learn to obey.”<sup>32</sup> In Schmoller’s estimation, the revolutionary “demagogues” of the working-class, advancing “extreme democratic demands” such as universal suffrage, merely feed off of the material deprivation and spiritual exclusion of workers from Germany’s cultural heritage.<sup>33</sup> The goal of social reform, then, is as much to ensure the loyalty of workers to the German Reich—their active participation in its global self-assertion—as it is to reflect in Germany’s economic institutions the ideals of justice embodied in its legal and religious institutions.

Perhaps more explicitly than Stein, Schmoller’s vision of social reform rests on a hierarchical and elite-oriented view of social institutions as they relate to the collective culture of

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<sup>30</sup> Gustav Schmoller, "Die Sociale Frage Und Der Preußische Staat," *Preußische Jahrbücher* XXXIII (1874): 336.

<sup>31</sup> "Schmoller on Class Conflicts in General," *American Journal of Sociology* 20, no. 4 (1915): 530.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 525.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 518, 29. Elsewhere, Schmoller’s attitude towards democratization is less polemical yet still fundamentally hostile: while he admits that the idea that political reform is a necessary precondition for social reform is “not entirely wrong,” he then advances a litany of complaints against universal suffrage: that it would also lead to enfranchisement of women and youth, encourage political careerism, and ultimately make class domination worse, rather than better. "Die Sociale Frage Und Der Preußische Staat," 341-42.

a political community. Schmoller's idea that social reforms express the implicit ethical understanding of a particular community authorizes elites to articulate and act on behalf of that implied ethical vision, even if it means limiting their direct accountability.<sup>34</sup> Historical economics was to bring to light these implicit moral ideals and the empirical effects, such that state institutions could be reformed to reflect them. Welfare institutions, then, were objects for this sort of intellectual and political leadership, mechanisms for both managing the needs and social worlds of lower classes so that they would be less susceptible to demagogic entirieties. These reforms promised to bring excluded groups, such as workers, into the sphere of the national community, ensuring that they could achieve the same cultural standards as others.<sup>35</sup> At times, this elitism took on biological overtones, as when Schmoller worries that a fully socialist political program would bring "a future breeding system which will produce wholly like human beings of a mediocre type."<sup>36</sup> At the very least, for Schmoller, social reform could ensure that Germany's national elites would retain the loyalty of the masses as they advanced their country's economic and political interests.

As influential theorists of reformist social liberalism, both Stein and Schmoller contributed to a general public acceptance of active state intervention into economic relationships on behalf of workers and other dependent groups. Yet their advocacy of what today we would call the welfare state is not complemented by—indeed, is meant to forestall—a commitment to the creation of new and more democratic public institutions. What conceptual ingredients hold

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<sup>34</sup> I am indebted to Bob Gooding-Williams for emphasizing this point to me.

<sup>35</sup> Gooding-Williams shows how this focus on the notion of exclusion, rather than questions of domination, contributes to the idea that the political integration of subordinated groups should occur through respectable elite leadership. Indeed, Schmoller's understanding traveled quite widely, as it influenced conceptions of African-American politics via the thought of W. E. B. Du Bois, who studied with Schmoller in Germany. Robert Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois: Afro-Modern Political Thought in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 19–65.

<sup>36</sup> Schmoller, "Schmoller on Class Conflicts in General," 519.

these two aspects of their thought together? To an extent, they are simply following in the footsteps of the earlier cameralist discourse of a strong and benevolent state responsible for public happiness. However, they both faced new historical realities: the democratic revolutions of 1789 and 1848 and the emergence of an organized working-class movement. In response to these developments, Stein and Schmoller seek to conceptualize those revolutionary political conflicts as *social* conflicts, driven primarily by basically calculable conflicts of material interests and distribution, such that they are amenable to state-initiated administrative resolution. Thus, for Stein, the social movement—the transition from a feudal to an industrial hierarchical order—drives the democratic demands of the working-class: if workers' dependency on capital can be reduced through the provision of education and small amounts of property, they will have no reason to pursue a democratic political form. In Schmoller's hands, this line of reasoning is expanded into the broader hope that social reform efforts responding to the material deprivation and spiritual exclusion of workers from the national community will secure their loyalty to the self-assertive German Reich.

#### Citizenship from Below: The Working-Class Vision of the Social

The theory and practice of social liberalism, as well Bismarck's reforms, while ultimately unsuccessful in defeating the perceived Social Democratic threat, nonetheless did speak to genuine tensions in the German working-class political movement. While workers and their representatives played an important role in the 1848 revolution, the Germany labor movement first found organizational form through Ferdinand Lassalle and the General Association of German Workingmen (*Allgemeiner Deutsche Arbeiterverein, ADAV*), founded in 1863. Lassalle was crucial in advancing a distinctive working-class political consciousness and so challenging the exclusivity of the German bourgeois, but his political programs tended towards precisely the state-centric amelioration of the conditions of workers supported by Stein and Schmoller. Indeed,

in 1863 Lassalle wrote to Bismarck that “the *Arbeiterstand* instinctively gravitates toward dictatorship once it [the *Arbeiterstand*] can be rightly convinced that this dictatorship will be carried out in its own interests.”<sup>37</sup> Ironically, the Lassallean organizations suffered under his and his successors dictatorial leadership, and in 1869 disaffected Lassalleans joined with the rival Union of German Workmen’s and Educational Societies (*Verband deutscher Arbeiter- und Bildungsvereine, VDAV*) to found the Social Democratic Labor Party in Eisenach. SPD leaders and activists sought, as much as possible, to eliminate the lingering influence of Lassallean statism on the working-class movement. At the same time, however, they saw that the increasing state recognition of the plight of workers powerfully legitimated the agitation of the SPD and the free trade unions.

Thus, the decline of dogmatic, laissez-faire liberalism and the increasing recognition of the interlinked “social question” and “workers’ question” by social liberals posed both a threat and an opportunity to the German workers movement, as did Bismarck’s partial pursuit of state socialism through his social insurance laws. On the one hand, the influence of social liberal discourse reflected widespread concern over the grievances of workers—both as legitimate claims in themselves and as the potential source of conflict and political disruption. It signaled the growing acceptance of trade unionism and the politicized negotiation of working conditions and wages. Indeed, the late nineteenth century saw a flurry of research into working conditions in factories, living conditions in overcrowded cities, the history of trade unions and guilds, and possible ameliorative social welfare institution such as insurance schemes. At a municipal level, liberal politicians, often working in uneasy alliance with SPD councilors, pursued projects, such

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<sup>37</sup> Quoted in Hermann Beck, "Working-Class Politics at the Crossroads of Conservatism, Liberalism, and Socialism," in *Between Reform and Revolution: German Socialism and Communism from 1840 to 1990*, ed. David E. Barclay and Eric D. Weitz (New York: Berghahn Books, 1998), 69-70.

as public housing, publically regulated work exchanges, and various forms of municipal welfare and work relief, all aimed at improving the working and living conditions of the proletariat.<sup>38</sup> If the SPD could claim these reforms as their own and use them to intensify the solidarity of workers, they provided powerful tools for recruitment and political mobilization. On the other hand, the increasing impact of social liberalism, insofar as it was pursued to create and reinforce the image of a “social monarchy”, began to trouble the SPD’s commitment to political democratization as a precondition for any meaningful change in the working conditions of laborers. Insofar as an express goal of social liberalism was to avoid “destabilizing” demands for republican government, these various social reform efforts, focusing SPD activists on immediate gains and encouraging participation in existing state institutions, threatened the SPD’s standing as the only social force fully upholding the democratic legacy of 1848.

How did SPD activists, leaders, and politicians respond to these enticements and dilemmas? And what does their response tell us about the potential connection between democratic agency and welfare institutions? On the surface, much of the SPD’s engagement with social welfare institutions confirms both the hopes the social liberals and fears of radicals in the party. Yet I want to insist, despite apparent convergence, that there were substantive differences between the social liberal desire to use material amelioration of workers’ conditions as an antidote to working-class radicalism and the SPD’s strategic engagement with social reforms. The core differences had to do with the relationships between social reform and political reform and, relatedly, the role that self-organized workers would play in workings of the institutions that threatened to turn them into passive clients. Through their practical engagement with social reform efforts, the SPD articulated a vision of the social at odds with the social liberal project.

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<sup>38</sup> On the SPD and municipal social reform politics, see Jan Palmowski, *Urban Liberalism in Imperial Germany: Frankfurt Am Main, 1866-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

While social liberals hoped to integrate workers, as much as possible, into the political institutions and social norms of the existing German society, the SPD used social reform to craft an alternative vision of citizenship, one that focused as much, if not more, on inter-class solidarity in pursuit of political principles as it did on individual contributions to society—contributions articulated, in Germany, especially through the framework of education (*Bildung*) and social respectability. Even as SPD leaders, activists, and members accepted and worked within emerging social welfare projects, they contested both the moralizing and individualizing understanding of the social question advanced by reformers and any implication that the creation of social welfare institutions indicated a lessening of class tensions in German society. If anything, the SPD saw such partial concessions as a sign that victories for the dominated classes would only be won through constant extra-parliamentary pressure and the strategic use of parliamentary institutions to pressure both the government and the bourgeois parties.<sup>39</sup>

Bismarck's social reform initiatives immediately confronted the SPD with the question of the relationship between political and social reform. The SPD leadership was implacably hostile to the constitutional structure of the German Reich, with its sham parliamentarianism and unaccountable executive. While universal suffrage in Reichstag elections gave the SPD a political foothold, the political influence of popular movements was restricted both by the extremely unequal electoral districts, heavily tilted towards rural areas, and the power of the states in the upper house—the *Bundesrat*—dominated by Prussia, with its three-class suffrage system. Their hostility both to the conservative-dominated government and to the pro-government bourgeois, represented by the National Liberals, only intensified as the Anti-Socialist Laws forced the SPD organization underground. State suppression of the SPD made

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<sup>39</sup> Gerhard A. Ritter, *Social Welfare in Germany and Britain: Origins and Development*, trans. Kim Traynor (New York: Learnington Spa, 1986), 71-75.

anti-government, pro-democracy rhetoric into a crucial rallying point for the underground party organization. *Der Sozialdemokrat*, the underground SPD official paper smuggled into Germany from Zurich, regularly updated party members and workers on the repression of workers' organizations and pummeled the bourgeois parties for abandoning their political principles. Indeed, the SPD's unwavering defense of democratic principles allowed it to attract constituencies beyond the industrial working class and was a major source of its appeal to the educated strata of German society.<sup>40</sup>

Thus, when Bismarck announced his pro-worker social reform program, the SPD had to formulate a response that accepted the material gains of the reforms without abandoning their program of political reform. The first, more straightforward strategy pursued by the SPD was to denounce Bismarck's proposals as inadequate: the implication being that Bismarck's reforms were inevitably constrained by the domination of capital, such that only the socialization of production would make possible adequate levels of redistribution and social protection.<sup>41</sup> No doubt, this tact left the SPD open to the charge of being the irresponsible opposition, able to advance unrealistic demands without them being subject to the pressures of political negotiation. Yet to the charge of stinginess the SPD added another, more formal, critique of Bismarck's social reforms, a critique that sought to show how the very structure of social reform would be

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<sup>40</sup> On the breadth of the SPD's electoral support, see Jonathan Sperber, "The Social Democratic Electorate in Imperial Germany," in *Between Reform and Revolution: German Socialism and Communism from 1840 to 1990*, ed. David E. Barclay and Eric D. Weitz (New York: Berghahn Books, 1998). For the importance of democratic commitments to SPD activists and intellectuals, see Vernon L. Lidtke, *The Outlawed Party: Social Democracy in Germany, 1878-1890* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), esp. 27-38; Glen R. McDougall, "Franz Mehring and the Problems of Liberal Social Reform, in Bismarckian Germany 1884-90: The Origins of Radical Marxism," *Central European History* 16, no. 03 (1983).

<sup>41</sup> Wolfgang Ayaß, "Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterbewegung Und Sozialversicherung Bis Zur Jahrhundertwende," in *Sozialstaat Deutschland: Geschichte Und Gegenwart*, ed. Ulrich Becker, Hans Günter Hockerts, and Klaus Tenfelde (Bonn: J. H. W. Dietz, 2010); Lidtke, *The Outlawed Party: Social Democracy in Germany, 1878-1890*, 158-71.

inevitably shaped and constrained by an undemocratic constitutional system. In particular, the SPD, along with the left-liberals, vocally attacked the government for introducing accident insurance without commensurate measures to ensure the safety of workers, such as new safety regulations and expanded factory inspections. Their point here was not just that the payment levels were inadequate: rather, it was to show that, when push comes to shove, Bismarck's real desire was to protect the total domination of employers over their own enterprises.

Crucial to this were the depoliticizing and rationalizing implications of insurance as a social practice.<sup>42</sup> By transforming the more immediate, personal relationships of employer and employee into general risk categories, accident insurance alleviated employers of direct accountability for industrial accidents. This was especially pressing in Germany, as the 1871 Employer Liability Law, far from reducing industrial conflict, generally lead to drawn-out legal battles to prove employer negligence, processes that only heightened workers' class-consciousness.<sup>43</sup> Insurance, and especially worker injury insurance, was attractive to Bismarck and the German government in part because it promised to transfer liability to general employer associations and so shield employers from direct accountability for the safety of their workers—and from the contentious political conflicts that arose when workers were injured.<sup>44</sup> To the SPD, this served, quite appropriately, as proof that, in the absence of political democracy that would

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<sup>42</sup> Accident insurance, Greg Eghigian observes, “seemingly offered German policymakers and reformers a way to institutionalize collective responsibility for the plight of workers without the threat of politicizing them. Modern insurance treated the world as composed of various kinds of risks. Rooted in statistics and probability, however, insurance’s notion of risk had less to do with the threat of danger than with the hazards of chance and randomness....Insurance’s logic of risk was and is therefore based on statistical principles of normativity (according to how one is situated in relation to the mass of others), not on juridical principles of justice (according to how culpable one is).” Greg Eghigian, *Making Security Social: Disability, Insurance, and the Birth of the Social Entitlement State in Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 56, emphasis in original.

<sup>43</sup> Mary Nolan, *Social Democracy and Society: Working-Class Radicalism in Düsseldorf, 1890-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 52-53.

<sup>44</sup> Ritter, *Social Welfare in Germany and Britain: Origins and Development*, 36-37.

genuinely empower workers and the majority, social reform efforts would lead to “the surrender of popular rights for the factory owners.”<sup>45</sup>

To be sure, on the issue of factory inspections and workers’ safety, the SPD’s views tended to merge with the left-liberals, even as a practical alliance was rendered impossible by the suffrage question.<sup>46</sup> Yet where left-liberal parties were in power, such as at the municipal level, the limits of the social liberal understanding of reform was evident. Liberal social reformers acting through municipal government and civil society welfare groups gave primacy to notions of self-help, responsibility, and subsidiarity.<sup>47</sup> Thus, for instance, while many liberals viewed favorably union-run friendly societies and insurance schemes, these were seen as an alternative to potentially redistributive state aid, which was to be restricted to the extremely indignant. Similarly, social liberals—and here they were allied with Protestant and Catholic social reform groups—strongly endorsed the principle of subsidiarity, whereby social insurance and welfare schemes should be run by voluntary associations separate from the state. Yet their defense of subsidiarity, for the most part, was not motivated by democratic concerns but by hopes that subsidiarity would lead to fiscal self-policing and, more importantly, inculcate values of thrift and responsibility among the recipients of social assistance. In this vein, social liberals linked subsidiarity to the development of a professional welfare administration marked by bourgeois

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<sup>45</sup> Quoted in Nolan, *Social Democracy and Society: Working-Class Radicalism in Düsseldorf, 1890-1920*, 53.

<sup>46</sup> Gustav Seeber, "Linksliberale Und Sozialdemokratische Kritik an Bismarcks Sozialreform," in *Bismarcks Sozialstaat: Beiträge Zur Geschichte Der Sozialpolitik Und Zur Sozialpolitischen Geschichtsschreibung*, ed. Lothar Machtan (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1994), 85-91.

<sup>47</sup> Palmowski, *Urban Liberalism in Imperial Germany: Frankfurt Am Main, 1866-1914*, 238; Ralf Roth, "Bürger and Workers: Liberalism and the Labor Movement in Germany, 1848 to 1914," in *Between Reform and Revolution: German Socialism and Communism from 1840 to 1990*, ed. David E. Barclay and Eric D. Weitz (New York: Berghahn Books, 1994).

social norms and the deployment of scientific expertise to address social welfare problems.<sup>48</sup> As a result, liberal reformers were skeptical of—if not outright hostile towards—active worker participation in the administration of social welfare institutions (more so with poor relief, less so with insurance), especially when such participation introduced a self-assertive and adversarial element into how workers’ viewed their social entitlements. Indeed, these questions of workers’ participation in municipal welfare institutions tended to divide the SPD from the social liberals as much, if not more, than issues of redistribution and taxation.<sup>49</sup>

Finally, the SPD attitude towards social reform, welfare institutions, and the very concept of the social more broadly was always filtered through, and determined by, their belief in organizing the masses for democratic politics and their attachment to the party as an independent political movement. Even as German liberals later, during the 1890’s, attempted to utilize mass-political techniques, they remained splintered and weakened by Bismarck’s tactics during and after unification.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, social liberalism remained marked by a basic hostility to divisive politicization through party politics—a phenomenon again especially marked at the municipal level—and instead remained attracted to notable politicians and a rarified view of public discourse.<sup>51</sup> This opened up space for the SPD, aligned with the free trade unions, to use new welfare institutions as instruments for further agitation and organization. These political

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<sup>48</sup> Sweeney, "Reconsidering the Modernity Paradigm: Reform Movements, the Social, and the State in Wilhelmine Germany," 416-17.

<sup>49</sup> Sweeney writes, “Over the course of these conflicts, SPD and trade union leaders returned to the theme of worker control, the self-organization of workers in welfare institutions, which they argued was compromised both by bourgeois control within the reform institution itself and by the property franchise in German municipalities more generally – a franchise that prevented workers from electing their own representatives to the very governing bodies which created the institution in the first place.” *Ibid.*, 423.

<sup>50</sup> Blackbourn and Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany*, 261-85.

<sup>51</sup> Dennis Sweeney, "Liberalism, the Worker and the Limits of Bourgeois *Öffentlichkeit* in Wilhelmine Germany," *German History* 22, no. 1 (2004).

opportunities were quickly recognized by August Bebel, who wrote to Engels in 1883 of the “possibilities for agitation” provided by the health insurance law.<sup>52</sup> Beyond the immediate instrumental usefulness of welfare institutions, which both attracted new workers to the movement through the promise of material benefits and provided extensive resources for the employment of party activists, the SPD’s vision of social reform saw mass mobilization as an *intrinsic* part of achieving the ends sought by reformers more generally.<sup>53</sup> In their view, without mass agitation, social reform efforts, no matter how fine-tuned by experts, would not address the most pressing issues facing workers, such as limited housing, mass unemployment, and, most importantly, direct conflicts with employers over wages and working conditions. Moreover, the SPD’s practice rejected the notion, so central to the social liberal discourse, that the social question was ultimately driven by fixed conflicts of interest that could be abstracted from the agency of workers and so resolved from above by state institutions—a point I return to and expand on in the discussion of Arendt in chapter 4.

One of the most dramatic examples of this view was enacted through the sickness insurance funds created through the 1883 law. These institutions became bastions of social democratic agitation even under the repressive Bismarckian anti-Socialist laws, leading to repeated calls for a government crackdown.<sup>54</sup> Bismarck himself was more resigned to this fact, reflecting his awareness of the limits of hierarchical state power. As he remarked in response to demands for a crackdown, “the insurance system must be lubricated with a drop of democratic oil

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<sup>52</sup> Quoted in Ayaß, "Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterbewegung Und Sozialversicherung Bis Zur Jahrhundertwende," 31.

<sup>53</sup> Philip Manow, "Social Insurance and the German Political Economy," *MPIfG Discussion Paper* 97, no. 2 (1997): 11.

<sup>54</sup> Ayaß, "Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterbewegung Und Sozialversicherung Bis Zur Jahrhundertwende."; E.P. Hennock, *The Origin of the Welfare State in England and Germany, 1850-1914: Social Policies Compared* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 151-65; Steinmetz, *Regulating the Social: The Welfare State and Local Politics in Imperial Germany*, 126-27.

if it is to run properly.”<sup>55</sup> These forms of participation were part of a much larger field of institutions that counter-balanced the tendency of the party to empower certain aspects of the leadership, such as through their ability to control the party conventions. And they fit well with an ideology that valorized, not unmediated, direct democracy, but broadening the possibilities for political mobilization and political participation while still allowing for some division of labor and structures of leadership within the workers’ movement.<sup>56</sup> By 1902, an estimated 100,000 worker representatives sat on the boards of these funds, marking them out as one of the most democratic public institutions in the largely authoritarian German state.<sup>57</sup> In that year, socialist activist and labor leader Paul Umbreit encapsulated these aspects of the SPD’s attitude social reform: self-organized workers either “assist the state, which seriously wants to undertake social reform, in combating unhealthy exploitation or they wrest real social reforms from that state which views the protection of employer interests as its sole purpose.” Through this popular engagement with welfare state institutions, workers can “direct [social reforms] to new possibilities,” reworking such institutions so that they “call on and organize workers themselves as the most knowledgeable interpreters of their own wishes and demands.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Quoted in Hennock, *The Origin of the Welfare State in England and Germany, 1850-1914: Social Policies Compared*, 127.

<sup>56</sup> For the classic critique of these forms of leadership from the perspective of direct democracy, see Robert Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchic Tendencies of Modern Democracy*, trans. Eden and Cedar Paul (New York: The Free Press, 1962). Furthermore, recent historical research has shown how Michel’s perception of the deference of the party membership to intellectual leaders may have been skewed by the relative lack of an industrial working-class membership base in Marburg. a close examination of his activities in Marburg, a small party branch without any significant base in the industrial working class, in which an unusual amount of deference was accorded to university-educated intellectuals, suggests that his reading of the mentality of the party’s rank-and-file may have been skewed by the experience,” writes Andrew Bonnell. Andrew G. Bonnell, “Oligarchy in Miniature? Robert Michels and the Marburg Branch of the German Social Democratic Party,” *German History* 29, no. 1 (2011): 34.

<sup>57</sup> Ritter, *Social Welfare in Germany and Britain: Origins and Development*, 79.

<sup>58</sup> Quoted in Florian Tennstedt, *Vom Proleten Zum Industriearbeiter: Arbeiterbewegung Und Sozialpolitik in Deutschland 1800 Bis 1914* (Cologne: Bund-Verlag, 1983), 416.

## Conclusion

Without a doubt, German social reform efforts, ranging from municipal reforms and civil society welfare organizations to Bismarck's landmark social insurance laws, brought with them normalizing and disciplinary effects. Indeed, to a large extent social reformers hoped that recognizing the material grievances and interests of the working class could enable the state and welfare institutions to carry out the cultural work of integrating workers into the norms of social respectability and into the German nation-state, with its perceived mission of becoming a colonial world-power. And as Stein and Schmoller make clear, this project of integrating workers through social reform was also meant to forestall the advance of threatening and destabilizing democratic principles and institutions—most notably, universal suffrage. In these respects, social liberalism, as theoretically articulated by writers like Stein and Schmoller and embodied in a broad range of political and cultural efforts, carried with it certain continuities with the earlier cameralist discourse of enlightened absolutism. Even as social liberalism accepted limited parliamentarianism and civil society as a domain with its own dynamics, it shared with cameralism a faith in the ability of social-scientific discourse and state institutions to master the contingencies born of the social. At a conceptual level, both cameralism and social liberalism accomplish this by presenting the social question as, first and foremost, a clash of material interests, material interests which can be abstracted from the situation at hand and made the object of technical knowledge and instrumental manipulation by state institutions.

Yet, as I have argued, viewing reform and welfare institutions only through this liberal vision of the social risks obscuring the opportunities for democratic agency that the formation of these new institutions opened up, opportunities irreducible to, even if bound up with, the disciplinary and integrative effects of such institutions. Of course, worker and SPD participation in these institutions focused some of their attention on immediate material gains rather than the

total transformation of society. But it is not the case that the qualified SPD acceptance of social reforms reflected a convergence with social liberalism. Rather, the SPD and the workers' movement, primarily through their practical engagement with these new institutions, pioneered their own vision of the social, one at odds with the social liberal project. This vision links social reform intrinsically with demands for democratization, mass political agitation and movement politics, and the direct participation of workers in the administration of welfare institutions. To the extent that they could, socialists put this vision into practice, using social reform to open new horizons of democratic action.

The next two chapters seek to provide a theoretical perspective that can situate the experiences of the German workers' movement in a broader account of the relationship between democratic agency and modern instrumental forces. I draw this account from the analysis of worldliness provided by Heidegger and Arendt. In their estimation, the tradition of philosophical reflection, of which Weber's theory of value represents the latest iteration, rests on a privileging of the theoretical that is then unable to account for our meaningful involvement in the world. And, especially as Arendt develops the line of thinking, such a perspective is unable to grasp the interaction between capitalism and modern processes of world alienation, let alone think through the possibility that political action helps restore and sustain our involvement in the world. A complex and multi-faceted concept in both of their respective thought, I deploy the notion of worldliness to help make sense of the possibility of collective agency even within institutional structures conditioned by and bound up with the imperatives of the capitalist economy. And, insofar as both Heidegger and Arendt are responding directly to the legacy of Weber and German neo-Kantianism, as I will argue they are, then their analysis of the notion of worldliness also helps to clarify the assumptions that, inherited from Weber, prevent contemporary theories of democracy from articulating these democratic possibilities within the welfare state.

### **Chapter 3. Excursus: Heidegger's Critique of the Philosophy of Value**

In my discussion of Weber, I argued that the conceptual categories he adopted from the Southwestern neo-Kantian philosophy of value informed not only his methodological self-understanding but also his substantive theory of political economy. From neo-Kantianism, Weber inherits the focus on the constitutive role of subjective value-orientations in the generation of knowledge in the cultural sciences. He goes beyond his philosophical contemporaries, however, in linking the possibility of transcendental value-relating to a historical sociology of the genesis of such values, an account which centers on charismatic ruptures with the everyday domain of repetitive material needs. Thus, even as the neo-Kantian philosophy of the social sciences has, in many respects, been superseded in philosophical reflection, it lives on through Weber's substantive sociology of domination, which forms the theoretical background for how political theorists conceptualize the normative promise and diagnose the social pathologies of the welfare state project.

The philosopher who is most responsible for consigning the neo-Kantian understanding of the cultural sciences to the graveyard of intellectual history is, of course, Martin Heidegger. Heidegger wrote his dissertation with Rickert and his early philosophical efforts were immersed in the neo-Kantian tradition.<sup>1</sup> Yet, starting with his first lecture course and culminating in *Being and Time*, Heidegger subjects to relentless critique the ontological incoherence of the neo-Kantian concepts of value and value-relation, a critique that will be appropriated and transformed by Arendt. Focusing on his 1919 lecture course “The Idea of Philosophy and the Problem of Worldview” and *Being and Time*, I here examine Heidegger’s critique of the neo-Kantian

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<sup>1</sup> Ingo Farin, "Early Heidegger's Concept of History in Light of the Neo-Kantians," *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 3, no. 4 (2009); Theodore J. Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger's "Being and Time"* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Ian Lyne, "Rickert and Heidegger: On the Value of Everyday Objects," in *Kant-Studien* (2000).

concept of value in terms of his attempt to recover the meaningfulness of the everyday world. However, I am interested less in the formal, philosophical success of Heidegger's early efforts—that is, his success in terms of his conceptualizations of language, meaning, and truth—than I am in how his critique opens up a new constellation of questions about political economy and welfare state capitalism, questions that are pursued in a more substantive register by Arendt.

In particular, Heidegger's substitution of the pre-given, meaningful world for constitutive value-stances enables Arendt to develop a theory of economic activities that shows how the everyday, as always already bound up with the disclosure of such a world, is irreducible to instrumentality.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the shift from thinking in terms of value to thinking in terms of meaning is what opens up an analysis of engagement with the world. As Lorenzo Simpson notes, "whereas meaning is worldly, value is worldless."<sup>3</sup> And thinking in terms of worldliness—of the context in which our activities are meaningful—can enable us to hold onto the language of value without reducing the social world to subjective projections of meaning: "values emerge from and have their point within meaningful practices....values arise from contexts of life as interpretations of, and as our way of representing to ourselves, what we are about as we participate in those contexts."<sup>4</sup> This insight will enable Arendt to pursue an analysis of how our instrumental, economic activities are interwoven with the constitution of a shared world. Yet Heidegger himself did not pursue this line of thinking. Lacking an account of the intersubjective constitution of the world, Heidegger remains closer to the neo-Kantians and Weber than he acknowledges, insofar as he too, despite his recovery of the pre-given, meaningful world,

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<sup>2</sup> For a contrary reading, one that argues that Arendt adopts Heidegger's antipathy towards the everyday, see Dana Villa, "Arendt, Heidegger, and the Tradition," *Social Research* 74, no. 4 (2007): 991-92.

<sup>3</sup> Lorenzo C. Simpson, *Technology, Time, and the Conversations of Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 45.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 46-47.

reduces the everyday to instrumentality.<sup>5</sup> In *Being and Time*, Heidegger echoes Weber's gulf between the charismatic generation of values and the everyday domain of instrumentality with the ontological difference: ontological reflection is possible only when the everyday (ontic) world, now understood in terms of the concealment of anxiety through immersion in instrumental action, breaks down.<sup>6</sup> It is here that Arendt parts ways with Heidegger. While for him the ontological difference reveals the instrumental character of everyday human affairs and so the superiority of philosophical and poetical thought, Arendt pursues Heidegger's own insight into the meaningfulness of the everyday world through her analysis of the disclosive capacity of everyday objects. And, as it turns out, Arendt can only see the non-instrumentality that adheres to the everyday by rejecting the ontological difference: only by doing so can she resituate worldly objects as always already inviting inter-subjective judgments rather than, as in Heidegger, pointing towards deeper, covered-up ontological grounds.

While Heidegger's public attitude towards neo-Kantianism was highly critical, his early thought developed in large part from the same general problematic of their philosophy of value:

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<sup>5</sup> To be clear, I am not claiming that Heidegger directly or consciously appropriates these themes from Weber. Rather, I think the turn to the extraordinary in both their thought is bound up with tensions that result from their historicization of Kant's empirical-transcendental dichotomy. As Weber and Heidegger can no longer look to the constitutive role of the transcendental ego as such, they both turn to the extraordinary as *historical* moments of transcendence that constitute a priori structures of meaning which are then absorbed and concealed by the everyday. Lafont has aided me in thinking about Heidegger's philosophy as a historicization of the transcendental ego, and I think the framework applies quite accurately to Weber as well. Cristina Lafont, *Heidegger, Language, and World-Disclosure*, trans. Graham Harman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> For the sake of space, I bracket the development of Heidegger's thought after *Being and Time*. Suffice it to note that even after he abandons this vocabulary he does not leave behind his basic belief in the instrumentality of the everyday, which inevitability forgets being as it is revealed in the extraordinary power of poetic and philosophical disclosures. See, for example, Heidegger's comment that "everyday discourse is a forgotten and therefore used-up poem, from which there hardly resounds a call any longer." Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: HarperCollins, 1971), 20.

the attempt to refute the domination of natural-scientific categories and recover the basis of cultural science in human life. Indeed, Heidegger devotes the 1919 lecture course that first established his reputation, “The Idea of Philosophy and the Problem of Worldview,” to a critical examination of the neo-Kantian grounding of the cultural sciences in the concept of value.<sup>7</sup> Value, as we saw in the previous chapter, provides the crucial hinge in the neo-Kantian theoretical edifice. Values at once secure the objectivity of the cultural sciences—thus elevating the cultural sciences to the same epistemic level as the natural sciences—while also showing how the cultural sciences are transcendentally based in the autonomous personalities of scientists, an autonomy which is conceptually eradicated in a vision of science which reduces the social sciences to the discovery of objective covering laws.

In these lectures, Heidegger subjects the neo-Kantians to a telling critique. However, as Heidegger views phenomenological critique as “a positive sounding out of genuine motivations” rather than mere demonstration of logical inconsistency, his criticisms all seek to give the neo-Kantian defense of the cultural sciences a firmer ontological ground (TDP 107). Heidegger provides this ground through his recovery of the everyday world. The world, he argues, is passed over by the neo-Kantians precisely because they start from a natural-scientific ontology and work backwards to a defense of the cultural sciences. As we will see, Heidegger’s critique of value and his recovery of the world crucially informs Arendt’s theorization of political economy in *The Human Condition*. In particular, while the theory of value implicitly leads to the view that the everyday is only given meaning through the subjective imposition of value, once the everyday world is brought to light, the economic—as always already bound up with the

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<sup>7</sup> Translated as *Towards the Definition of Philosophy*, trans. Ted Sadler (London and New Brunswick, NJ: The Athlone Press, 2000), hereafter cited as "TDP".

givenness of meaningful objects—cannot be reduced to objective regularities and instrumental action, against which we set the domain of subjective values.

Heidegger begins the lectures with a series of dense arguments that together point to the inherent circularity of the neo-Kantian attempt to ground the validity of knowledge in the normativity of values.<sup>8</sup> In the neo-Kantian framework, values constitute the validity of knowledge insofar as the community of researchers takes them up also as binding norms. This is even more so for cultural sciences, insofar as the very reality of the objects of knowledge are dependent on the binding normativity of the values that are deployed in constituting the objects through value-relations. Thus, as Heidegger observes, “the possibility of carrying through the systematic of philosophy of value depends on taking truth as a value and taking theoretical knowledge as a practical activity bound by a norm” (TDP 131). But where, Heidegger asks, does this bindingness come from? In the first place, the constitutive values that secure objectivity cannot themselves be understood as substantive objects existing apart from the research community, as this would overstep the boundaries of critical philosophy.<sup>9</sup> Nor can they be grounded in the factual structure of cognition, as the very validity of such facts is what is in question.

Faced with this problem, the neo-Kantians, as we have seen, turn to already given knowledge, especially historical knowledge, and inquire into the transcendental presuppositions of the validity of that knowledge. “The historical formations of cultural life are the real empirical occasion for critical-teleological reflection,” Heidegger notes (TDP 39). The history of culture

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<sup>8</sup> For an excellent discussion of this aspiration, see Frederick C. Beiser, "Normativity in Neo-Kantianism: Its Rise and Fall," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 17, no. 1 (2009).

<sup>9</sup> Recall that this was Weber’s objection to Rickert, who he saw as lapsing into metaphysics. However, Weber himself never fully confronted the conceptual tensions born of accepting the historicization of validity as one normative value among others.

serves both as an *object* of value-constituted knowledge and as a *source* for the values, most centrally objectivity, that constitutes that object. But history cannot play both these roles at once. If these values are taken to primarily *constitute* historical knowledge, then the question arises again of the source of their validity: “the criterion of value-judgement in teleological method [i.e., objectivity as a norm] are in fact the same questions which are to be decided with the assistance of teleological method” (TDP 36). Objectivity, as understood by the neo-Kantians, is a norm that prescribes that one value truth. Value-relating, however, is also meant to be a *definition* of truth: truth is just that knowledge which is constituted in accordance with the norm of objectivity. The neo-Kantians essentially define objectivity as the normative commitment to objectivity, and so beg the question. If, on the other hand, history is primarily the *source* of these values, then transcendental reflection is superfluous, because if “the ideal, the standard of oughtness, were ‘somehow’ found, then the problem for whose sake it was discovered would already be solved and the method would be illusory” (TDP 36). Heidegger thus concludes that the neo-Kantian method “presupposes, in its most proper sense and as the condition of its own possibility, just what it is supposed to arrive at” (TDP 36).

We should keep in mind, though, Heidegger’s admonition that phenomenological critique is always positive. Such critique seeks to uncover the genuine problematic that leads its target into self-contradiction. The conceptual deadlocks Heidegger brilliantly diagnoses are symptoms of broader tensions within the neo-Kantian project. Most basically, the neo-Kantians attempt to pursue two goals at once, goals that pull in opposite directions. On the one hand, neo-Kantians like Rickert wanted to secure for the cultural sciences the same theoretical authority as the natural sciences. On the other hand, they saw their efforts as an attempt to protect “spirit” and the dignity of culture from the vulgar materialism and mechanistic overtones of naturalism. Thus, in

pursuit of the first goal, they argue all knowledge, whether natural scientific or cultural, is constituted normatively through presupposed transcendental values like objectivity. With this move, they can argue that knowledge of historical particulars, even if they are constituted through the values of the researcher, can have the same objective validity as knowledge of law-like regularities. Yet, at the same time, their claim that values are constitutive for all knowledge implies that even natural-scientific knowledge is ultimately grounded in historical cultural life, insofar as that cultural life is the source of all these values. As Weber's writing reveals, these two tendencies pulled in opposite directions, until finally objectivity itself is relativized into one value among others that the social scientist happens to affirm. The defense of culture on the terms set by theoretical science thus seems to lead either to dogmatic metaphysics (Rickert, from Weber's perspective) or skeptical relativism (Weber, from Rickert's perspective). As Heidegger puts it in his spring lecture, while "the objectivity of cultural science is...dependent on the unity and objectivity of a *system of valid values*," it can never fully escape the disquieting sense that the "recognition of values, through which historical concept-construction occurs, [is] simply factual, itself historically variable...so that the objectivity of historical science is only apparent" (TDP 147-148, emphasis in original).

The internal contradictions of the neo-Kantian project, Heidegger then argues, can be traced back to a single source: "the primacy of the theoretical" (TDP 50).<sup>10</sup> The neo-Kantians take values as analogues to objects. While they resist taking them as objective in the sense of

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<sup>10</sup> In calling for an end to the primacy of the theoretical, Heidegger adds an important remark that should inculcate against the pragmatist interpretation of *Being and Time*: "This primacy of the theoretical must be broken, but not in order to proclaim the primacy of the practical, and not in order to introduce something that shows the problems from a new side, but because the theoretical itself and as such refers back to something pre-theoretical" (TDP 50). For the classic reading that focuses on Heidegger's account of practical involvement, Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division I* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991).

independent or standing against, they are nonetheless objects of theoretical cognition that guides the production of knowledge. As a corollary, the neo-Kantians, and especially Weber, reduce naïve (i.e., cognition before form-giving value-relations) to a stream of undifferentiated perceptions of sense data (in the language of *Being and Time*, they understand objects as present-at-hand [*vorhanden*]).<sup>11</sup> They thus *begin* with a theoretical model of human interaction with the world, where brute perception of thing-like objects and processes comes *before* the imposition of constitutive values, and work there way back from there to the subjective, lived basis of cultural knowledge. But, as we have seen, “knowledge cannot get outside of itself. If the circle [of the validity of values] is to be superseded, then there must be a science that is pre-theoretical or supra-theoretical, at any rate non-theoretical, a genuinely *primordial* science from which the theoretical itself originates” (TDP 81, emphasis in original). Such a primordial science would show that “every value-theory and *value-system*, indeed the very idea of a *system* that would essentially absolutize the theoretical, is illusory” (TDP 81, emphasis in original). A primordial science, Heidegger intimates, would be able to allow for the validity of scientific truth-claims while nonetheless upholding the primacy of cultural reality, as it would not attempt to build up that lived reality from a theoretical stance.<sup>12</sup>

Heidegger’s project of a primordial science culminates in *Being and Time*. Yet, his lectures already develop many of the central lines of argument that are fully worked out in *Being*

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1962), 111, 32-33, hereafter cited in text as "BT". Heidegger states this point most clearly in his discussion of Descartes' ontology, which he takes the philosophy of value to be attempting to “round out” by adding on a layer of subjective and cultural meanings and use-values. There, he writes, “[a]dding on value-predicates cannot tell us anything at all new about the Being of goods, *but would merely presuppose again that goods have pure presence-at-hand as their kind of Being*” (BT 132, emphasis in original).

<sup>12</sup> The extent of Heidegger’s success in pursuing both goals is a matter of heated debate. See Lafont, *Heidegger, Language, and World-Disclosure*; Hubert L. Dreyfus, "Comments on Cristina Lafont's Interpretation of *Being and Time*," *Inquiry* 45 (2002).

*and Time*, with the added benefit that he develops them in explicit contrast to the neo-Kantian concept of value. Therefore, while Heidegger will develop these arguments in much more detail, the lectures provide an especially clear statement of the difference between Heidegger's notion of meaningful worldliness and the neo-Kantian concept of value. Centrally, Heidegger argues that the concept of value seeks to capture genuine features of, even as it distorts through objectification, the nature of the everyday world. To see this, he first strives to bring into sight the everyday world, which consists of our pre-theoretical environment [*Umwelt*]. When one is immersed in the word, Heidegger observes,

the meaningful is primary and immediately given to me without any mental detours across thing-oriented apprehension. Living in an environment, it signifies to me everywhere and always, everything has the character of world. It is everywhere the case that 'it worlds' [*esweltet*], which is something different from 'it values' [*eswertet*] (TDP 61).

In this important passage, Heidegger already lays out the paths his thought would travel. When one encounters something (Heidegger's example is his lectern), one does not encounter it as a brute object but directly as a lectern, as always already a meaningful part of one's environment. There is no moment when values are applied to sense-data such as to constitute a meaningful object. Rather, all objects, unless they are theoretically apprehended, are pre-structured by the worlding of the world, a worlding that, if one attempts to grasp it theoretically, "collapses upon itself" (TDP 73).

For our purposes, what is instructive about Heidegger's effort is that it resituates the notion of value, moving it from a subjective or objective end-in-itself that constitutes cultural reality to the way that the appearance of a given object or activity always already has a claim on

me in a particular context. Heidegger argues, “the value 'is' not, but rather it 'values' in an intransitive sense: in being worth-taking [*Wertnehmen*], 'it values' for me, for the value-experiencing subject” (TDP 39).<sup>13</sup> Insofar as every experience in a world is pre-given as meaningful, it is also pre-given as valuable in some way. We do not primarily experience this value by relating the environmental object to an abstract value or ultimate end. Rather, the object always shows up to me as in some way pre-judged by the totality of my meaningful commitments. As Heidegger later writes in *Being and Time*, when we interpret something (i.e., recognize it as culturally significant) “we do not stick a value on it” but instead lay out the involvements “the thing in question already had” (BT 190-191).

Broadly, then, Heidegger’s primordial science begins from our pre-given involvement with a meaningful world. The world does not simply occur but worlds and values, opening up our always already meaningfully structured activities and commitments. And by starting with this everyday, pre-given world, Heidegger can reveal the illegitimate theorization and subjectivization inherent in the neo-Kantian philosophy of value. Starting from the theoretical perception and trying to move back to the meaningful involvement, the neo-Kantians are forced to transform the meaningful world into graspable, object-like values. But, Heidegger notes, “‘valuing’ becomes an object only through formalization” because “‘object’ is a misleading designation: our language is not adequate to the new basic type of lived experience involved here” (TDP 39). And the way out of this impasse, Heidegger insists, is to see that meaning is something immediately given, before theoretical objectification, in our everyday involvement with the world. Once this is recognized, meaning can no longer be taken as something that is

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<sup>13</sup> In making the related point that not valuing is not intrinsically experienced as an “ought”, Heidegger uses the example of his delight in entering his study in the morning and observes that “there is, therefore, a kind of lived experience in which I take delight, in which the valuable as such is given” (TDP 38).

subjectively imposed on brute sensory data by relating such perceptions to constitutive values, whether objective or subjective. Our involvement in the world cannot be grasped in terms of subjectively or objectivity, and our language, which is structured around that opposition, leads us away from this primordially set of experiences. As that which first makes objects intelligible, it is not something that is itself an object, and as that in which individuals move in their everyday involvements, it is not something that is subjectively constituted by individuals. Furthermore, unlike values, the world is not something that we can speak about as though characteristically, or even possibly, owned or possessed.<sup>14</sup> Rather, with his analysis of the everyday world, Heidegger draws attention to the fact that the values that, for Weber, are constitutive both of personality and of social-scientific knowledge are grounded in a totality of historically-given meaningful involvements, a totality that always escapes full theoretical explication.

Heidegger's critique of neo-Kantianism has had the most obvious ramifications in subsequent debates around hermeneutics and the philosophical basis of the social sciences. For my purposes, though, the central question is how his recovery of the everyday world challenges Weber's configuration of the relationship between charismatic political agency and the everyday domain of the economic. Indeed, one of the assumptions guiding my investigation is that attempts to grasp the cultural basis of social life cannot but rest on implicit and often un-clarified assumptions about the relationship between cultural and political agency and the reproduction of economic structures. For Weber, constitutive values arise precisely through breaks with the domain of everyday, economic needs. Any cultural meanings that legitimate structures of domination, structures that are grounded in the satisfaction of everyday needs, are only residues

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Martin Heidegger, "Origin of the Work of Art," in Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 43ff. In his later marginal comments on *Being and Time*, Heidegger remarks that he should have spoken of Dasein being given a world rather than having one. Cited in Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division I*, 202.

of such charismatic ruptures with the everyday. Values arise, ultimately, from attempts to satisfy the extraordinary need for a meaningful resolution of the problem of suffering and theodicy. Yet, Heidegger shows that one of the basic assumptions of this configuration—that the instrumental pursuit of everyday needs is outside of the meaningfulness produced by charisma—is untenable. According to his analysis of worldliness, the usefulness of even the most mundane use-object is always already bound up with a totality of meaningful involvements, a totality that is ontologically grounded in the fact that the ultimate meaning of *Dasein*'s being is always a question.<sup>15</sup> Thus, even as Heidegger repeats Weber's critique of the everyday in terms of instrumentality, he does not ground this, as Weber does, in the inherent meaninglessness of the objects necessary for satisfaction of everyday needs.

This fact points to the second decisive shift Heidegger brings about—a turn away from the subjective imposition of value to the intrinsic or essential meanings objects have as they appear in our day-to-day concern involvement with the world. Heidegger reinterprets this intrinsic meaning phenomenologically. In our pre-theoretical comportment, we encounter worldly objects as intrinsically meaningful because they appear to us directly as what they are, as a hammer, a lectern, or whatnot. To be sure, Heidegger then wants to trace this essential meaningfulness of objects back to an original endowment of meaning (or “Being”) that forms the historical *a priori* of the totality of essences, a historicized Platonism rejected by Arendt. The

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<sup>15</sup> “Whenever something ready-to-hand has an involvement with it, *what* involvement that is, has in each case been outlined in advance by the totality of such involvements....But the totality of involvements itself goes back ultimately to a ‘towards-which’ in which there is *no* further involvement: this ‘towards-which’ is not an entity with the kind of Being that belongs to what is ready-to-hand within a world; it is rather an entity whose being is defined as Being-in-the-world, and to whose state of Being, worldhood itself belongs. This primary ‘towards-which’ is not just another ‘towards-which’ as something in which an involvement is possible. The primary ‘towards-which’ is a ‘for-the-sake-of-which’. But the ‘for-the-sake-of’ always pertains to the Being of *Dasein*, for which, in its Being, that very Being is essentially an *issue*” (BT, 116-117, emphasis in original).

crucial point, however, is that he *detranscentalizes* the meaningfulness of objects without turning back to a sovereign, meaning-endowing subject, a turning that robs objects of any sense of intrinsic or objective meaningfulness that could stand against instrumental manipulation. With this phenomenological re-interpretation of the essential meaningfulness of objects, we can analyze how the meaningfulness of objects—the standing-against humans of an objective world—conditions agency such as to allow for the intrinsic meaningfulness of human activities, all without the vacillation between subjectivism and objectivism characteristic of the neo-Kantian philosophy of value.

As will become clearer in my discussion of Arendt, Heidegger's opening up of the everyday world of always already given meaningful involvements thus shifts the focus of any analysis of the relationship between the political and the economic. Weber and subsequent liberal theorists focus on how subjective values—whether generated by charismatic ruptures or by constitutional consensus—can be imposed on the economic. The implicit problem guiding that project—how can a domain of instrumental activity be constrained and governed by moral or charismatic values?—already presupposes that the economic domain is one of present-at-hand objects which receive their meaning from the outside. Once the ready-at-hand aspect of all use-objects is brought to light, however, the question cannot be one of how to regulate it through subjective values that stand apart from the economic domain. Rather, the question becomes one of what social and political conditions can attune those immersed in everyday pursuits to the ‘for-the-sakes-of-which’ that are presupposed in their ‘in-order-to’s’. In other words, if meaning is not something that is subjectively imposed on given objective materials, if it is something that everyone is always already moving within, then the task is to develop a diagnostic vocabulary that can at captures the economic-structural forces that, to such a large extent, produces the

meaninglessness of the everyday which is ontologically assumed by both Weber and Heidegger, while also pointing to the social and political possibilities for restoring and augmenting the meaningfulness that is to some extent presupposed by all social activity. Heidegger's analysis of the everyday world, especially as Arendt develops it, shows that those potentialities are always already available within the everyday and that the turn towards the extraordinary, far from rescuing meaningful democratic agency, is in fact a symptom of its unavailability.

### The Instrumentality of the Everyday in *Being and Time*

Before turning to how Arendt uses Heidegger's analysis of worldliness to develop such a vocabulary, I want to consider Heidegger's own failure to pursue his insights into the meaningfulness of the everyday. As is well known, Heidegger understands everyday Dasein as, while immersed in a meaningful world, constantly covering-up the ultimate significance of its own action by unownedly relying on the meanings given by "the one."<sup>16</sup> Beyond further illuminating his relationship to Weber and neo-Kantianism, Heidegger's critique of the everyday in terms of unownedness is worth considering because many commentators take Arendt to be repeating it, although with a political, rather than philosophical-existential, focus. Thus, Jacques Taminiaux argues that Heidegger's concepts of ownedness [*Eigentlichkeit*] and unownedness [*Uneigentlichkeit*], as an interpretation of the ancient distinction between *praxis* and *poiesis*, are the inspiration for Arendt's distinctive account of action in contrast to labor and work.<sup>17</sup> Arendt

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<sup>16</sup> I prefer the translations "ownedness" and "unownedness" to authenticity and inauthenticity for *eigentlichkeit* and *uneigentlichkeit*, for the reasons enumerated in Edgar C. Boedeker, "Individual and Community in Early Heidegger: Situating Das Man, the Man-Self, and Self-Ownership in Dasein's Ontological Structure," *Inquiry* 44, no. 1 (2001): 96 n. 35. In addition to all the problems with the terms authenticity and inauthenticity, the term ownedness highlights the individualizing and self-disclosing aspects of Heidegger's account of being-towards-death, aspects that are important for Arendt.

<sup>17</sup> "Fundamental ontology is regulated by the basic distinction between *Uneigentlichkeit* and *Eigentlichkeit*, the former characterizing everyday preoccupation and concern (*Besorgnis*), the

breaks with Heidegger, in Taminiaux's account, by emphasizing the Aristotelian and inter-subjective dimensions of *praxis*, dimensions which are obscured by Heidegger's implicit Platonism.<sup>18</sup> If this is the case, then we should read Arendt's account of work, like Heidegger's account of unownedness, as an account of the meaninglessness of the everyday, against which is opposed the meaning-disclosing and individualizing potential of self-contained political *praxis*. What interpreters like Taminiaux and Villa fail to ask is whether Arendt's critique of Heidegger's Platonism and emphasis on the inter-subjective constitution of the world leads her to re-evaluate *poesis* and the everyday, in addition to the extraordinary and *praxis*. So as to see exactly how Arendt's account of work and *poesis* is distinctive, though, we must examine Heidegger's notion of unownedness insofar as rests on a critique of the everyday in terms of instrumentality, albeit one constructed in ontological rather than subjectivist terms.

While Heidegger's thought underwent numerous refinements between his early lectures critiquing the neo-Kantian philosophy of value and *Being and Time*, one of the most significant was his attempt to develop a satisfactory account of the roots of human ontological self-misunderstanding in our existential constitution. "The kind of being which belongs to Dasein," he writes, is "such that, in understanding its own Being, it has a tendency to do so in terms of that entity towards which it comports itself proximally and in a way which is essentially constant—in terms of the 'world'" (BT 36). This effort is bound up with a second major shift in

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latter care (*Sorge*). Such a distinction contains a hierarchy in that both preoccupation and concern are forms of fallen care. This distinction reappropriates the Aristotelian distinction between *poeisis* and *praxis*. *Praxis* in the Aristotelian sense rules over *poeisis*. It owes this ruling to its self-referential character." Jacques Taminiaux, *Heidegger and the Project of Fundamental Ontology*, trans. Michael Gendre (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 124.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 130ff. Villa, for whom self-containedness is one of the most important characteristics of Arendtian action, follows Taminiaux in this respect. Dana Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger: The Fate of the Political* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); "The "Autonomy of the Political" Reconsidered," *Graduate Faculty philosophy journal* 28, no. 1 (2008).

his thinking: his thought that the everyday world of pre-given meanings is always already constituted through the public norms of “the one” and, thus, that humans have an existential tendency to “fall” into these norms and thereby cover-up their own existential constitution. The one is Heidegger’s term for the taken-for-granted, always already there background norms of how “one” does something around here. Importantly, Heidegger thinks this is an unavoidable and positive aspect of being human: these public norms are what allow for the “constancy” of the self and so is part of Dasien’s positive constitution.<sup>19</sup> Yet, with this necessary existential horizon provided by the one comes the “one-self”, the self-understanding that is characteristic of the one and that is how individuals tend to understand themselves in a day-to-day manner.<sup>20</sup> This tendency to understand one’s self in terms of the “one-self” Heidegger dubs “fallenness”: “The Self, however, is proximally and for the most part unowned, the they-self. Being-in-the-world is always fallen” (BT 225). Yet, Heidegger’s concern with unownedness is not conformism or shallowness as such, despite the sometimes-heated rhetoric that implies the contrary. Rather, he worries that fallenness and the they-self lead individuals to an ontological projection that takes themselves, others, and the world as technically and instrumentally manipulable.

Within these various ontical self-understandings given in the everyday, Heidegger thinks, lurks an implicit *ontological* pre-understanding. In their day-to-day existence, individuals act in such a way that the existential horizons that constitute the meaning of their activities are transparent to them.<sup>21</sup> So, they do not recognize that their ability to use a hammer as a hammer is always already constituted through the horizon of the totality of significations implied in such a

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<sup>19</sup> BT 166-167.

<sup>20</sup> For the important distinction between the one and the one-self, see Boedeker, "Individual and Community in Early Heidegger: Situating Das Man, the Man-Self, and Self-Ownership in Dasein's Ontological Structure."

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 70-72.

use. Similarly, in their day-to-day interactions with others they do not recognize the horizon of being-with that constitutes all the roles and activities that make sense in a given context. As a result, Heidegger argues, they tend to misunderstand the ontological constitution of the world, others, and themselves. In order to take the public norms of the one for granted and act such a manner, individuals implicitly understand themselves as ready-to-hand objects that can be fitted into a web of concerned [Besorgnis] engagements. “Everydayness takes Dasein as something ready-to-hand to be concerned with,” Heidegger writes (BT 336). And, further, in taking being-with-others as something ready-at-hand, we further pass over our the totality of meanings that constitute ready-to-hand objects and take them as something present-at-hand: “the phenomenon of the world itself gets passed over” and in its place humans understand “the meaning of Being...by what is present-at-hand within-the-world, namely, Things” (BT 168). Thus, human’s everyday absorption with the world and fallenness in the they-self, while an unavoidable and necessary part of our existential constitution, leads us ontologically astray. We tend to understand others and ourselves only in terms of ready-to-hand objects that are to be used according to public rules, and then, more fundamentally, to see the ultimate reality underneath those norms as simply present-at-hand objects that can be fully graspable in terms of conceptual knowledge. Both of these ontological misunderstandings are driven, Heidegger thinks, by the structure of the everyday, where individual’s concerned involvement with objects and fallenness into the public norms of the one lead them to pass over the existential horizons that are simply always already there.

By implicitly projecting ourselves as ready-to-hand and Being as present-at-hand, our everyday comportment generates an ontology that takes others and the world as technically calculable and instrumentally manipulable objects. Thus, Heidegger’s critique of the everyday

proceeds at an ontologically deeper level than Weber's: while Weber takes the everyday to be dominated by instrumental action, Heidegger argues that the structure of the everyday generates the very ontological projection that takes objects and others to be technically manipulable in the first place, an ontological projection Weber presupposes. With the ontological projection formed through our everyday concerned use of objects and fallness into the they-self, Dasein comes to understand its own obligations and activities as dischargeable through the technical actions, as if the norms were just more objects with which to be concerned. In our everyday concern, Dasein is "something that gets managed and reckoned up" (BT 336). Consequently, everyday "common sense" understands obligations as "only the satisfying of manipulable rules and public norms and the failure to satisfy them. It reckons up infractions of them and tries to balance them off" (BT 334). Heidegger's concern is not just with the "vulgarity" or utilitarianism of such everyday morality, as this ontological understanding is shared by the "theory of value": even as they oppose instrumental self-interest, neo-Kantians still regard humans "as an entity with which one might concern oneself, whether this 'concern' has the sense of 'actualizing values' or of satisfying a norm" (BT 339). Finally, Heidegger argues, although briefly, that this ontological projection is also the condition of possibility of the domination of one person over another. When an individual understand itself in terms of the they-self and others as ready-to-hand objects, there becomes the possibility that one can "take 'care' away from the Other and put itself in his position in concern...[i]n such solicitude the Other can become one who is dependent [*Abhängigen*] and dominated [*Beherrschen*]” (BT 158).<sup>22</sup> In short, Heidegger argues that the ontological projection that makes possible instrumental mastery arises from the structure of the

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<sup>22</sup> In this comment, Heidegger further emphasizes the link between the everyday taking of others in terms of the ready-to-hand: "This kind of solicitude, which leaps in and takes away 'care', is to a large extent determinative for Being with one another, and pertains for the most part to our concern with the ready-to-hand" (BT 158).

everyday. In passing over our basic existential constitution, everyday comportment gives rise to an ontological understanding that takes objects primarily as present-at-hand, others as ready-to-hand such that they can be manipulated through the concerned pursuit of ends, and all responsibility as a system of calculable and dischargeable rules.

Heidegger's critique of unownedness, then, rests on an analysis of the everyday in terms of instrumentality. He construes this instrumentality, however, ontologically: before the everyday can be the domain of materially driven instrumental action, it must already generate the ontological projection that makes instrumental action possible. Even Weber's value-rational action remains within the ontological orbit of this instrumentality, insofar as it construes value as something technically masterable. To this account of the instrumentality of the everyday, Heidegger, like Weber, opposes the extraordinary, now interpreted moments when the null basis of Dasein intrudes into and disrupts such everyday mastery, moments that are the condition of possibility of ownedness. Notoriously, Heidegger identifies death as an ever-present possibility that could disrupt the everyday if its existential implications are taken seriously. Death, properly understood, cannot be fitted into the concerned engagements of the everyday. The everyday norms and rules given by the one all rest on the possibility of representation, insofar as individuals are represented as "one's occupation, one's social status, or one's age": "representability is not only quite possible but is even constitutive for our being with one another" in an "everyday manner" (BT 283). The one thing that escapes such networks of representation is death. In death, "this possibility of representing breaks down completely...*no one can take the Other's dying away from him*" (BT 284, emphasis in original). The non-representability of death, the extraordinary moment that cannot be subsumed under the calculative norms of the everyday, is what ultimately individuates Dasein's out from the

domination of the one. The one tries to suppress the significance of death by representing it, as a fact to be known or as a future possibility that can be existentially deferred. Such interpretations of death produced by the one try to treat humans as “something present-at-hand or ready-to-hand” (BT 289). Existentially, though, death is precisely what reveals that Dasein is neither an object of cognition nor something relative to calculable public norms (BT 289). Rather, death is what “discloses Dasein as a possibility” (BT 309). Heidegger does not mean, though, that death paradoxically positions us as spontaneous creators of meaning or value. Rather, Dasein is possibility precisely because, insofar as we are limited by mortality, we can choose between the possibilities provided by public norms and significations without a final, calculable justification for such choices.<sup>23</sup>

Death, then, is for Heidegger that which breaks into and disrupts the everyday. While the everyday is characterized by concern and representability, death is the extraordinary moment that cannot be represented and cannot beconcernfully mastered as either ready-to-hand or present-at-hand. Individualizing Dasein, death is existential pre-condition for overcoming the ontological project of the everyday and acting such that one recognizes the non-calculable basis of one’s being. Heidegger characterizes this mode of acting as ownedness. But the question arises: how can the extraordinary moment of death have any bearing on individual’s other behavior, such

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<sup>23</sup> To this extent, Heidegger’s ethics can be characterized as decisionistic, so long as one is careful to distance it from any celebration of the decision *as such*. Yet, for Heidegger, confronting this nothingness that inheres in all choices (the fact that, given mortality, it closes down other possibilities and cannot be reduced to technical rules) is meant to reveal the existential condition of possibility of guilt and so of moral responsibility. More problematic, to my mind, is his argument that the only source of such a call and of the non-masterable basis of morality is the confrontation with the non-relational possibility of death. Heidegger lacks a theoretical vocabulary to distinguish between inter-subjectivity that places individuals in a relationship of representation and so of technical mastery and one that places them in a relationship that grounds moral responsibility through the call of another. Thus, his model is ultimately one of the relationships between the individual and either the one or their non-relational and non-representable death.

that it can allow individuals to transform the they-self into an owned self? Heidegger answers this question through his analysis of the call of conscience and guilt. In this analysis, we can again see how the opposition between the everyday and the extraordinary guides Heidegger's account. Heidegger gives a phenomenological account of the call of conscience so as to show how the possibility of death can have a hold on Dasein such as to allow for activity that reflects our ownmost potentiality-for-being. In his account, the call—that which brings Dasein face-to-face with the necessity of taking-over public meanings in an ownmost manner—appeals to Dasein because Dasein is constitutively guilty. And Dasein is constitutively guilty, in turn, because of our mortality—every choice leaves a residual nothingness of lost possibilities, and so Dasein is intrinsically guilty in whatever possibilities it projects itself onto. Thus, the call of conscience can be thought of as the phenomenological connection between the extraordinary fact of mortality and Dasein's everyday comportment.

Crucially, in order for the call to be heard, it must “interrupt” the “listening-away” of the everyday constituted through the one and its public interpretations to speak directly an individualized Dasein (BT 316). Heidegger goes to great lengths to show that the call comes from without the individual, seemingly from nowhere, and thus cannot be understood as a product of human activity or fitted into the everyday network of the ready-to-hand. And, and most importantly, the content of the call—“Guilty!”—is such that it cannot be absorbed into the ontological projection of the everyday. While the everyday interprets such guilt in terms of ready-to-hand norms or a present-at-hand lack that can be technically mastered, “[t]he ‘Guilty!’ which belongs to the Being of Dasein is something that can be neither augmented nor diminished. It comes *before* any quantification, if the latter has any meaning at all” (BT 353, emphasis in original). Thus, the call of conscience, as that which interrupts the everyday

interpretations of the one and confronts Dasein with its constitutive guilt, is what gives the extraordinary moment of death its hold in the activities of Dasein such that Dasein can appropriate and transform the meanings given by the one in terms of its ownmost potentiality-for-being.

Finally, Heidegger's account of how the individualizing moment of death has a hold on Dasein, transforming the unowned they-self into owned potentiality-for-being, is meant to attest to the possibility of a particular type of activity, one closely tied to Heidegger's understanding of philosophy.<sup>24</sup> Such an activity, emerging out of the interruption of everyday calculability, intervenes at an ontological rather than merely ontical plane of historical reality. Heidegger associates the ontical with the everyday and the ontological with the extraordinary. His attempt to show how individual Dasein can overcome the everyday by hearing the call of conscience is also an account how Dasein can become aware of the ontological implications of their activity, implications that are obscured by the misleading ontological projection of the one. Heidegger's term "resoluteness" [*Entschlossenheit*], as closing related to the notion of disclosure [*erschliessen*], indicates precisely this sort of openness to the ontological horizon that constitutes the meaning of one's activity: "*The resolution is precisely the disclosive projection and determination of what is factically possible at the time*" (BT 345, emphasis in original). In resoluteness, Dasein responds to the factual, particular situation within which it finds itself in such a way that it does not obscure the distinctiveness of the situation. Such recognition of the concrete situation, emerging out of Dasein's resolute awareness of mortality, Heidegger calls the

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<sup>24</sup> Heidegger, in fact, simply defines philosophy as any activity that takes hold of and possibly alters the ontological disclosure of the meaning of being. So, for instance, physicists who challenge the ontological assumption of their inherited knowledge are philosophers: "Neils Bohr and Heisenberg think philosophically through and through." Cited in Lafont, *Heidegger, Language, and World-Disclosure*, 262.

moment of vision [*Augenblick*]. The theological overtones of this concept already point to the potentially ontological intervention such a moment of vision opens up. The moment of vision, which illuminates the concrete situation in the context of Dasein's awareness of death, thus discloses to Dasein the higher, historical significance of its activities by illuminating the available possibilities for acting in such a way that Dasein can take over and repeat, in a new concrete situation, the ontological pre-understandings that are given by a historical tradition.<sup>25</sup>

Heidegger renders this possibility most clearly in his discussion of historicality.<sup>26</sup> Historicality, he argues, is the resolute awareness of the concrete situation that "brings Dasein into the simplicity of its *fate* [*Schicksals*]" (BT 435, emphasis in original). This is how we designate Dasein's primordial historicizing, which lies in its own resoluteness and in which Dasein *hands* itself down to itself, free for death, in a possibility which it has inherited and yet has chosen" (BT 435, emphasis in original). Heidegger's use of the freighted language of fate and destiny point to the significance of "owned historicality": through such resolute repetitions, Dasein is able to intervene such as to alter the ultimate significations that determine the structure of the everyday. Such modes of action, then, are always philosophical in Heidegger's distinctive sense—they deal with the fundamental projections that determine the intelligibility of individual beings, rather than just following the pre-established patterns of a prior projection. It does so not

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<sup>25</sup> This focus on historical significance contrasts with Dreyfus's interpretation of Division II, which sees it more as a description of acquiring virtuous mastery of a particular activity. Hubert L. Dreyfus, "What Could Be More Intelligible Than Everyday Intelligibility? Reinterpreting Division I of Being and Time in the Light of Division II," *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society* 24, no. 3 (2004).

<sup>26</sup> I have been particularly helped by Thomson's discussion in thinking through these issues. Iain Thomson, "Heidegger and the Politics of the University," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 41, no. 4 (2003); "Heidegger and National Socialism," in *A Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005). Notably, Heidegger told Karl Löwith that the chapter on historicality was the philosophical basis for his Nazism. *Ibid.*, 34-35.

through an ungrounded leap out of the everyday and into charisma but rather by appropriating aspects of its cultural heritage with a full awareness of how the concrete situation has invalidated the routines of the everyday, the awareness Heidegger calls resoluteness. Resoluteness, Heidegger says, runs ahead of such everyday understanding and anticipates “every possible moment of vision that may arise from it” (BT 443). In this respect, resoluteness and owned historicality parallel Heidegger’s conception of philosophy. Just as resoluteness opens up and anticipates the concrete situations that owned historicality intervenes into, philosophy “leaps ahead...it some area of Being, discloses it for the first time in the constitution of its being...and makes them available to the positive sciences” (BT 30-31). Philosophy, as Heidegger conceives of it, is the activity that penetrates the routine understandings of the positive science such as to grasp ahold of these new ontological possibilities. Thus, like owned historicality, it breaks with existing routines to project upon new possibilities that are more attuned to the current situation. In short, against the everyday—whether of the one or scientific routines—Heidegger opposes the deeper, ontological interventions of owned historicality and philosophy.

In sum, Heidegger’s critical engagement with the neo-Kantians points to the ontological shortcomings of the concept of value, which, in its effort to work back from scientific knowledge to the lived basis of cultural activity, fails to grasp the meaningfulness of the everyday world. As a result, he is able to articulate how Weber’s response to instrumentality, far from overcoming the meaninglessness of the everyday, reinforces it—an insight that will be crucial for Arendt’s own account of the worldly aspects of the economic. Yet, even as Heidegger seeks to recover the everyday from the positivistic ontology of the neo-Kantians, he follows Weber in critiquing the everyday in terms of instrumentality, only now understood in an ontological rather than subjectivist manner. Alongside this insistence on the non-masterability of Dasein’s facticity is

Heidegger's strong belief in the possibility of steering the destiny of being through owned historicality and philosophy, a belief that finds its basis in the related distinctions everyday/extraordinary and ontic/ontological. These conflicting tendencies—between Heidegger's analysis of the non-masterable meaningfulness of the everyday world and his disdain for the one and the ontic—run through his early thought. Thus, even as he hopes that “[i]n the moment of vision...existence can master [*meistern*] the ‘everyday’,” Heidegger nonetheless, but perhaps regretfully, acknowledges that “it can never extinguish it” (BT 422).

## **Chapter 4. ‘Fit to Enter the World’: Hannah Arendt, Worldliness, and Modern Capitalism**

Heidegger’s critical analysis of the philosophy of value throws into relief the implicit commitments and presuppositions that form the backdrop for Weber’s political analysis of the relationship between Bismarck’s social welfare policies and Germany’s tortuous democratization. For Weber and his intellectual heirs, the participation of German workers in Bismarck’s welfare institutions reflected their increasing integration into the German national community—integration that promised to counteract the potentially destabilizing values espoused by their erstwhile charismatic leaders. Occluded by this theoretical perspective is the possibility that the participation of workers in the administration of these institutions, far from disciplining them via the repetitive, instrumental imperatives of material life, opened up within those institutions unforeseen spaces of judgment and action. My contention is that this occlusion is not accidental—indeed, that it is produced by and reinforced by the terms of Weber’s political thought, as well as of earlier social liberal theorizations of the welfare state. The social liberal tradition that runs from early *Staatswissenschaften* theorists through von Stein and Schmoller, by analogizing the state to a household that must engage in national economics, positioned welfare measures as a response to demands for democratization. In this respect, Weber stands in this tradition, and yet his account of the origin of ultimate values in charismatic ruptures with the everyday enables him to move beyond the inherited terms of German social liberalism. On the one hand, Weber’s theory of value distills the hierarchical underpinnings of that earlier discourse, insofar as the demands of the everyday are always absorb values into hierarchical structures of domination. But Weber’s historicization of such values in terms of the fundamental problem of theodicy breaks with the earlier social liberal views, which still rested on an implicit acceptance of pre-given communal norms, and enables him to connect welfare measures to the

formation of charismatic leadership that could provide the masses with new political values and forge their solidarity to the German nation-state.

From the perspective of Arendt's political thought, the subject of this chapter, Weber's view represents a late iteration of the anti-worldly basis of what she calls the tradition of political thought. As the following analysis will seek to show, the basic terms of Weber's thought—and most centrally, the role that values, understood as ends-in-themselves, play in securing Weber's understanding of personality and political agency—presuppose the loss of precisely what Arendt will seek to recover: our ongoing engagement with and attachment to the shared world. Here, I turn to Arendt's analysis of worldliness, one clearly indebted to Heidegger's thought, which Arendt calls, in her early essay on existential philosophy, "the first absolutely and uncompromisingly this-worldly philosophy."<sup>1</sup> Arendt's subsequent effort to develop a fully this-worldly account of political life functions as a powerful critique of Weber, one that, further, can help articulate the significance of the forms of political participation within welfare institutions exemplified in the German case. And while Arendt's analysis of worldliness is opened up by Heidegger's account, she pursues a resolutely political analysis of worldliness, one that sees our attachment to the world as sustained by non-technical judgments over shared objects of concern. Moreover, she harnesses this view of worldliness, and of the inherited philosophical categories that produce what Arendt calls world alienation, to a critical account of the worldlessness of modern capitalist social processes, which continuously erodes what I term the worldly mediations of economic activities.

In the first place, then, the following seeks to reconstruct Arendt's account of worldliness, especially insofar as it bears on the relationship between political action and

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<sup>1</sup> Hannah Arendt, "What Is Existential Philosophy?," in *Essays in Understanding, 1930-1945: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1994), 179.

economic structures. Yet my broader concern is with how this approach can help us perceive and articulate the location and structure of democratic action within the welfare state. While Arendt does not elaborate a comprehensive theory of the welfare state, she does provide a range of conceptual terms that prove fruitful for thinking about the relationship between political action and economic forces in contemporary post-industrial societies. In particular, and contrary to the received wisdom about her thought, Arendt offers valuable resources for considering the role welfare institutions play in allowing economic activities and processes to enter political life as the possible objects of public judgment and collective action. Indeed, she does so by calling into question basic assumptions that inform both the deliberative and radical democratic views of the welfare state: most centrally, their shared tendency to conceive of economic activities only in terms of instrumental rationality and technical calculation.

It may appear peculiar to turn to Arendt for inspiration on theorizing the significance of economic affairs and the welfare state for democracy. After all, as her critics argue, she notoriously insisted that economic and social problems were inappropriate objects of public debate and political action. One might say that few aspects of her thought have attracted as much critical scrutiny and evoked as much frustration from even sympathetic commentators.<sup>2</sup> While for some scholars Arendt's thought is valuable precisely for its uncompromising defense of the autonomy of political action, many others seek to rescue Arendt from her apparently overdetermined criticisms of the social by reformulating her distinction between the political and the economic-cum-social: for instance, they claim that the distinction is about an instrumental and anti-political ethos or mentality rather than social problems as such, or else they emphasize

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Bernstein, "Rethinking the Social and the Political," in *Philosophical Profiles: Essays in a Pragmatic Mode* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986); Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, "Justice: On Relating Private and Public," *Political Theory* 9, no. 3 (1981); *The Attack of the Blob: Hannah Arendt's Concept of the Social* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

Arendt's criticisms of the modern administrative state or argue that Arendt's critique of the social constitutes a euphemism for her abhorrence of the practice of social climbing.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, some of the most influential attempts at salvaging Arendt on the social do so by appropriating her thinking for either the deliberative democratic or radical democratic view of welfare state politics. For example, Seyla Benhabib (recasts Arendt's distinction between the political and the social as one between "the *attitude of narrow self-interest...[and] a more broadly shared public or common interest,*" while Bonnie Honig argues that the "[t]he permeability, inexactness, and ambiguity of [Arendt's] distinction between public and private" opens up the possibility of attenuating such a distinction through ongoing contestation.<sup>4</sup> Both these responses, however, misapprehend what, as I argue in the following, is distinctive about Arendt's account of political economy, and so reinforce dominant, ossified understandings of the relationship between politics and economics. In their own ways, both the deliberatively- and radically-democratic responses still cast the economic as a domain of technical mastery, a domain that can be *politicized*, but only by transforming it with, respectively, universal values or agonistic contestation. They therefore reinforce precisely what Arendt seeks to counter: the image of economic activities or mentalities as characteristically instrumental, particular, and private.

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<sup>3</sup> Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger: The Fate of the Political*; "The "Autonomy of the Political" Reconsidered."; Ella Myers, *Worldly Ethics: Democratic Politics and Care for the World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013); Linda M. G. Zerilli, *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Kirstie M. McClure, "The Social Question, Again," *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 28, no. 1 (2008); Jill Locke, "Little Rock's Social Question: Reading Arendt on School Desegregation and Social Climbing," *Political Theory* 41, no. 4 (2013).

<sup>4</sup> Seyla Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1996), 145, emphasis in original; Bonnie Honig, "Toward an Agonistic Feminism: Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Identity," in *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt*, ed. Bonnie Honig (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 146.

In the following, I revisit Arendt's analysis of political economy to argue that, far from stringently upholding the divide between politics and economics, she elucidates sophisticated accounts of both the possible interrelationships between them and the vital importance of economic matters in political life. For Arendt, I argue, the danger is not the invasion of politics by economics but rather the reduction of economic matters to instrumental calculation. Against this reduction, Arendt provides resources for theorizing the economic, not as a domain of instrumental mastery and technical calculation, but as a site where material necessity and political action might be appropriately mediated. Arendt is as much, if not more, concerned about the *loss* of the contexts in which economic problems can appear as objects of shared concern as she is with the invasion of politics by instrumental or calculative mentalities and attitudes. She recovers what I call the worldly dimensions of the economic—the institutional conditions that allow economic matters to appear as possible objects of public deliberation and action. Her concern, in short, is not with economic mentalities or means-end thinking as such but rather with the loss of these worldly, institutional mediations of material necessity, a loss that entails the deleterious consequence that economic concerns tend to enter politics as mere matters of administration and technical mastery.

My reading of Arendt's theory of political economy, further, allows us to resituate her critical attitude towards the welfare state. The question, I argue, is not: why did Arendt uphold such a rigid and unconvincing conceptual distinction between the political and the economic? Rather, it is: why did Arendt fail to pursue her own insights into the worldly dimensions of the economic when analyzing social politics in modern welfare states? The answer, I contend, resides in the logic of Arendt's account of expropriation, which neglects the political agency propelling expropriation and the institutional mediations of even contemporary accumulative

processes. Once these shortcomings are brought to light, Arendt provides surprisingly pertinent resources for theorizing the political and historical significance of welfare state politics, understood as world-building efforts to institutionally counter-act the force of expropriative processes and restore a worldly dimension to economic activities and relationships.

I proceed as follows: In the first section, I examine Arendt's analysis of political economy in *The Human Condition*, arguing that her concern there is to provide an account of how economic activities—the self-interested pursuit of material ends—potentially open up new spaces of appearance and judgment. She thereby shows that economic activities, properly understood, are not reducible to instrumental calculation and technical mastery. In the second section, I argue that this account informs a constellation of concepts Arendt deploys—class, interest, and property—that together constitute the worldly dimensions of the economic. In each case, she counters a reductively economic interpretation of the term, instead using them to point to the institutional mediations between material necessity and political action. In the third section, I consider why, given her attempt to recover a non-reductive understanding of the economic, Arendt asserts that in the contemporary welfare state economic matters manifest themselves in the form of technically calculability and therefore as a dire threat to political freedom. I argue that the problem arises from her exaggerated and undifferentiated understanding of expropriation. Examining the logic of her account, I identify some of the theoretical and historical weaknesses of her conceptualization of the emergence of capitalist accumulation, weaknesses that subsequently inform her equivocal view of welfare state politics.

I conclude with some considerations and concrete examples of how Arendt's theorization of political economy provides insights into, on the one hand, the political and democratic significance of the modern welfare state and, on the other, struggles over social needs. Indeed,

despite her own pessimistic conclusions, Arendt provides compelling resources for a perspicacious analysis of the institutions we associate with the modern welfare state—not as the mere technical means for the administration of needs and material necessity, but as mediating institutions that transform such necessity into the worldly interests and concerns that are possible, indeed, unavoidable, objects of political activity. Such moments of worldly mediation are, I argue, overlooked by both deliberative democratic defenders of welfare institutions (who view these institutions as the product of non-instrumental public reasoning), as well as by radical democrats (who reduce such institutions to their instrumental, normalizing effects). In drawing attention to these moments, Arendt thereby orients political reflection to the issue of how the various objects and institutions that mediate the domain of economic necessity become sites of public disputation. Political struggles over social and economic questions, from this perspective, are always also world-building practices: even though their immediate end may be redistribution, state-building or economic security, such struggles inevitably transform these demands into lasting aspirational and institutional objects, objects whose appearance cannot be grasped in terms of mere instrumentality. As objects—as worldly, tangible things—such goals and institutions themselves open up shared spaces of appearance and judgment. They thereby become the objects of democratic attachment and the occasions for the exercise of political freedom, augmenting our involvement with and concern for the world.

#### Instrumentality and Appearance: Political Economy in *The Human Condition*

I begin with Arendt's engagement with theories of political economy in *The Human Condition*, where she lays the conceptual foundations for the worldly approach to the economic I

explicate in the next two sections.<sup>5</sup> Yet, of all Arendt's books, this one would seem to be an unlikely starting point for the recovery of a positive account of her attitude towards political economy. Often considered her most "Greco-philic" book, *The Human Condition* contains some of Arendt's most caustic remarks about the ascendancy of economic and social problems in modernity, a fact that leads some commentators to insist we displace its importance for Arendt's thought.<sup>6</sup> And indeed, Arendt's analysis in the opening chapters of the book appears to confirm such concerns. There, she details how the reversal of the ancient Greek distinction between the public and the private—the emergence of the concerns related to material necessity from the household and into the public—leads to the rise of self-aggrandizing economic processes described by the discourse of political economy (HC 28-29). From the perspective of the ancients, the very concept of political economy is "a contradiction in terms" (HC 29). The channeling of economic forces into the public realm transforms the state into a bureaucracy, "a kind of no-man rule" (HC 40). Furthermore, the rise of public housekeeping means the ascendance of predictable "everyday behavior" over the extraordinary "rare deeds" that "illuminate historical time" (HC 42-43). Thus, given Arendt's desire to restore to political action the glory it obtained in ancient Greece, we can safely view her various accounts of economic activities throughout the book as a critique of the dangers they pose to politics.

However, this is far from Arendt's last word on these matters. Her most critical analysis of political economy occurs before she has developed her own account of the relationship between the economic activities she terms work and labor. Arendt's analysis of the concepts of labor and work is an effort to grapple with the significance of economic processes and the

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<sup>5</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), hereafter "HC"

<sup>6</sup> Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*; Margaret Canovan, *Hannah Arendt: A Re-Interpretation of Her Political Thought* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

activities behind them, both in themselves and in relation to other forms of activity, such as the participation in public life. To jump ahead briefly: as Arendt distinguishes them, labor refers to activities focused on the unceasing satisfaction of biological needs, while work signifies those activities that transform raw materials into lasting the tools and objects of the built human world. Work and labor, then, constitute two analytically distinct but interrelated aspects of economic activities, as Arendt interprets them. And while her discussion of labor and work seeks to identify aspects of such activities that, in her view, have been neglected by historically dominant interpretations of economic activities, her deployment of these terms nonetheless tracks to important facets of ordinary experience and linguistic usage: the association of economic activities with material scarcity as well as with calculative, means-ends thinking. Crucially, I will argue, she challenges the notion that economic activities can be exhaustively understood in those terms and that they therefore always pose a threat to collective political life, which depends, in Arendt's view, on a variety of perspectives and the exercise of non-technical judgments on matters of collective concern (HC 175-248).

Notably, the contours of Arendt's discussion of political economy early in *The Human Condition* are set by the ancient Greek interpretation of the distinction between politics and economics, which separated out the private activities of the household, understood as a domain of domination and economic necessity, from the free public life of the *polis*. The discourse of political economy, in Arendt's view, inverts the ancient Greek interpretation, elevating necessity and public housekeeping above political life. However, as recent commentators have convincingly argued, one of Arendt's central concerns as her argument proceeds is to show how the ancient Greek understanding of the *vita activa*, combining labor and work into the single

category of economic necessity, distorted subsequent philosophical and political reflection.<sup>7</sup> This section builds on these recent accounts in reconstructing Arendt's positive attitude towards work and instrumentality, insofar as such activities mediate between subjective need and political action. For Arendt, such mediation is possible because things and objects, even as they are oriented towards the instrumental pursuit of goals, also potentially open up spaces of appearance and judgment—that is, they are potentially received and discussed in terms other than just technical usefulness and through that reception generate relationships between individuals concerned with the shape or appearance of the world. A space of appearance is thus a context that is constituted by shared objects of concern, a space in which both objects and the individuals discussing them appear. This dual aspect of objects Arendt terms their worldliness, which reflects the human capacity to construct a lasting world of artificial objects that comprise a stable, meaningful location for various activities and affairs. One of Arendt's guiding thoughts is that the ancient Greek attitude towards material necessity obscured, in the tradition of political thought, the importance of work and thus the worldly aspect of everyday objects. In her view, that stability or worldliness can only be sustained if objects are seen not just as instrumentally useful but also as the objects of ongoing care, discussion, and judgment, in both the mundane contexts of everyday life as well as in the more rarified realms of art and culture. As we will see, this dual aspect of economic activities and worldly objects that Arendt articulates in *The Human Condition* provides the conceptual backdrop to her analysis of the worldly dimensions of the economic, which I discuss in the next section. To see why, we must pursue her detailed analysis of labor, work, and worldliness in *The Human Condition*.

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<sup>7</sup> Patchen Markell, "Arendt's Work: On the Architecture of *the Human Condition*," *College Literature* 38, no. 1 (2011); Roy T. Tsao, "Arendt against Athens: Rereading *the Human Condition*," *Political Theory* 30, no. 1 (2002).

After her critical discussion of the rise of the social in the first portion of the book, Arendt introduces her “unusual” (HC 79) distinction between labor and work. Labor, as the activity corresponding to the “vital necessities” of “life itself” (HC 7), at first appears trapped by the cycles of biological necessity. But Arendt observes that without a fixed objective context outside of nature, life cannot take on its cyclical rhythm: “[it] is only within the human world [built through work] that nature’s cyclical movement manifests itself as growth and decay” (HC 97). Thus, labor, while distinct from work, nonetheless relies on work’s capacity to build a durable context of lasting objects for the manifestation of cyclical necessity. Work, in these terms, creates what can broadly be termed everyday objects—things that are defined primarily in terms of their use or purpose, as with a table or a chair. Arendt quickly finds, however, that the internal logic of *homo faber*—humans understood in their capacity as workers and makers—undermines the very goal of erecting a stable world that led her to turn to work in the first place. Centrally, and in contrast to the repetitive cycle of laboring, the creation of everyday objects is primarily intelligible in terms of instrumentality. “Here it is true that the end justifies the means,” writes Arendt, “it does more, it produces and organizes them” (HC 153). The standards of *homo faber* are first and foremost instrumental, determined by the use of the final object *homo faber* produces. Though an object “is an end with respect to the means by which it was produced...it never becomes...an end in itself, at least not as long as it remains an object for use” (HC 153). Yet, on these terms, Arendt finds that the world of objects can no longer fulfill its role as providing a stable context that mediates between subjectivity and the cycles of nature. When everyday objects are understood only as means, they inevitably get pulled back into the rhythms of necessity characteristic of labor: “the life process takes hold of things and uses them for its purposes”, giving rise to a “process of growing meaninglessness where every end is transformed

into a means” (HC 157). While work was meant to build a context in which the human relationship to nature could be meaningful, on its own terms it is incoherent—“utility established as meaning generates meaninglessness” (HC 154).

At this point in Arendt’s argument, then, her analysis of work appears to affirm her earlier pessimistic account of the rise of the social. Whatever the distinction between labor and work may be doing, Arendt nonetheless embraces a view of the private, economic sphere as an instrumental domain constantly overwhelmed by material necessity. Yet, as Arendt’s argument proceeds, we see that the reduction of everyday objects and economic activities to instrumentality, far from being the starting point for Arendt’s reflections, is actually the problem she seeks to diagnose and counter. This becomes clear in the course of her discussion of *homo faber*’s response to the problem of meaninglessness. Aware that instrumentality alone cannot establish meaning, *homo faber* searches for some source of meaning that can guide its instrumental pursuits. Against the world of everyday instrumentality, *homo faber* picks out some end or ultimate value and declares it beyond instrumentality, an “end in itself” (HC 155). Arendt registers two complaints against *homo faber*’s attempt to stop the meaninglessness of instrumentality by elevating an end-in-itself. The erection of an end-in-itself, she says, causes *homo faber* “to turn away from the objective world of use things and fall back upon the subjectivity of use itself” (HC 155). Unable to grasp the meaningfulness of the world, *homo faber* comes to understand all meaning as derived from the subjective, non-instrumental orientation towards an end-in-itself that give objects their purpose. Arendt repudiates this move because it installs humans as the complete master over nature and the world, “robbing both of their independent dignity (HC 156). This leads Arendt to her second complaint against the erection of the end-in-itself: that it misunderstands the nature of meaning and worldliness, which,

recall, refers in part to the way in which a stable world of objects orients and contextualizes other human activities. “Meaning,” Arendt writes, ”must be permanent and lose nothing of its character, whether it is achieved or, rather, found by man or fails man and is missed by him” (HC 155). As Arendt observes, the very dignity of an instrumental activity depends on the ends of that activity being viewed as independent, an independence that cannot be manufactured by arbitrarily declaring something an end-in-itself.

Such concerns, Arendt notes, led Plato to react to Protagoras’ belief that man is the measure of all use-things and declare that the god, not man, is the measure even of use objects (HC 158-159). But Arendt thinks that this retreat to fixed, objective standards is no longer possible. Having identified *homo faber*’s need for a given source of meaning that transcends the domain of use, how does Arendt avoid the path taken by Plato? A first clue is to be found in Arendt’s careful choice of words in her observation about meaning. While, according to Arendt, Plato searches for transcendental or objective measures to govern the domain of use, she writes only that meaning must be “permanent” for it to help constitute the meaningfulness of the world. Here, then, Arendt picks up and develops Heidegger’s insight into the structure of the everyday world. For Weber, of course, meaningfulness was a product of subjective choice—it was not something that could really be missed by our activities. Yet Arendt, as we will see, strives to develop this idea of permanence in a resolutely worldly direction, without tracing meaningfulness back to extraordinary, meaning-giving moments of resoluteness: the permanence of meaning comes from the stability of the built material contexts in which we carry out our activities. And in the final two sections of her chapter on work—“The Exchange Market” and “The Permanence of the World and the Work of Art”—Arendt gives an account of how the significance of objects can be permanent without transcendental grounds such that they can

constitute the meaningfulness of the world. By attending to how objects form a space within which they and others appear, Arendt finds a source of meaningfulness that can ensure the world fulfills its purpose of providing a stable context that mediates between the instrumental demands of necessity and the political realm of action. While *homo faber* starts from the instrumentality of economic pursuits and so must turn to something non-instrumental—the end-in-itself—for a source of meaning, Arendt’s account challenges the starting point of that effort: that economic activities and everyday objects are adequately grasped in terms of instrumentality.

The first change in the significance of objects occurs, Arendt argues, when we move from the privacy of production and use to the publicity of the exchange market. Once production is oriented towards exchange, “the finished end product changes its quality somewhat but not altogether” (HC 163). When objects emerge from the privacy of production and use and enter into the “public realm” of the market, their durability changes from durability in use to durability in exchange (HC 163). Objects, here, acquire a limited permanence that outlasts their immediate instrumentalization—what Arendt calls their value. And, crucially, Arendt points to the fact that, in the market, objects appear as the source of such permanence. “Value is the quality a thing can never possess in privacy but acquires automatically the moment it appears in public,” writes Arendt (HC 164). This value is formed neither by private use and need nor by a distinct set of ultimate ends-in-themselves but by the fact that objects “[appear] to be esteemed, demanded, or neglected” (HC 164). Thus, in the marketplace, objects acquire a new meaning and significance as they are subjected to the judgments of a public. However, such judgments remain limited, insofar as the criteria of the exchange market remains exchange and, thus, usefulness relative to other objects: in the market, objects “exist only in relation to some other thing” (HC 166). While opening up Arendt’s alternative account of how we can talk about the meaning or significance of

objects, of their ability to form a stable context for human action, the exchange market fails to sustain the permanence and meaningfulness of the world. The moment that the appearance in the public of the market gives objects a new durability and imbues them with value, the market reabsorbs them into the relativity of exchange and, by extension, the flux of means and ends Arendt has already diagnosed.

Despite this failure of the exchange market to ground the permanence of meaning, Arendt's investigation of it has shifted where such permanence could be found. Rather than something intrinsic to the purpose of an object or descending from a transcendental source or end-in-itself, the exchange market reveals that value, permanence, and meaning, properly understood, comes from the esteeming of a discerning public. Yet, even as the market opens up some space for evaluative judgment about everyday objects, a space not immediately overwhelmed by necessity, it nonetheless remains caught in the relativity of exchange. Finally, however, Arendt turns to a class of objects whose distinctive nature is to hold open this space for as long as they exist: the work of art.<sup>8</sup> Works of art, Arendt writes, are objects "which are strictly without any utility whatsoever and which, moreover, because they are unique, are not exchangeable and therefore defy equalization through a common denominator such as money" (HC 167). The work of art, because it is beyond use, "can attain permanence throughout the ages" (HC 167); it is actualized only when it is preserved so as "to shine and to be seen" (HC 168). Simply put, the work of art's purpose is to hold open a space of appearance in which it is talked about, evaluated, and passed on. And it is this space that halts the decaying forces of necessity and exchange and ensures that in the work of art "the very stability of the human

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<sup>8</sup> cf. Bernard Flynn, "The Places of the Work of Art in Arendt's Philosophy," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 17, no. 3 (1991); Markell, "Arendt's Work: On the Architecture of the Human Condition," 31-34.

artifice...achieves a representation of its own" (HC 167-168). However, understood only in this manner, the work of art, as something extraordinary that is removed from the domain of use objects, only further highlights the instrumental nature of everyday objects.

Yet art, for Arendt, is not a matter of independent aesthetic objects and values; on the contrary, in her analysis of exchange she points to how value is more fundamentally constituted by the appearance of objects to judging spectators. The significance of the work of art does not exist independently of that space of appearances. And this phenomenological ground she gives for the nature of value and permanence leads her to her last insight, one that finally undermines any reduction of economic activities and everyday objects to instrumentality. She writes, "[e]verything that is, must appear, and nothing can appear without a shape of its own; hence there is in fact no thing that does not in some way transcend its functional use, and its transcendence, its beauty or ugliness, is identical with appearing publically and being seen" (HC 172). This quality of every object indicates how meaningfulness can have a permanence that transcends use: the significance of every object is to some extent determined by its public appreciation, an appreciation that indeed can be missed by whoever creates the object. Because the product of all instrumental action—its end—appears to others, a core element of all instrumentality exceeds the terms of mere use and instrumentality. Such transcendence, however, is not constituted by some set of absolute standards or intrinsic values posited over-and-against the domain of material necessity and instrumentality. Rather, it comes about from within economic activities and everyday use-objects, as every object, no matter how ordinary, is "judged not only according to the subjective needs of men but by the objective [i.e., lasting, permanent - SK] standards of the world where they will find their place, to last, to be seen, and to be used" (HC 173).

## Class, Interest and Property: The Worldly Dimensions of the Economic

Arendt's phenomenological account of the significance of everyday objects opens up a way of analyzing economic activities as always exceeding the terms of instrumentality and technical control. It thus forms the crucial backdrop for her analysis of expropriation and modern capitalism, which, in her mind, risks transforming the contexts of economic activities such as to rob them of these worldly mediations. Before we can see the full significance of expropriation in Arendt's thought, though, we must examine a constellation of concepts—class, interest, and property—that together fill out Arendt's vision of the possible worldly and institutional mediations of material necessity and instrumentality.<sup>9</sup> Arendt's unusual take on each otherwise familiar concept positions them as at once instrumental and non-instrumental, at once oriented towards some concrete goal or instrumental end while also holding open a non-instrumental space of appearance and judgment. Her analysis, focusing on the manner in which each concept mediates between subjective, material needs and political spaces of appearance and judgment, centrally rests on her observation that objects always appear and so are more than mere instruments that can be subject to the will of a single individual. Thus, Arendt's analysis crucially extends her account of work and the non-instrumental aspect of economic activities and everyday objects.

While elliptical, Arendt's discussion of class in *On Revolution* brings out this connection to her non-reductive account of work and the objects work creates.<sup>10</sup> Arendt introduces her conception of class in the course of a discussion of the American Constitution as a “tangible

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<sup>9</sup> Commentators have at times considered these concepts independently as antidotes to the supposed emptiness of Arendtian politics, but they have not reconstructed them together to provide a complete picture of Arendt's attitude towards the political significance of economic phenomenon. "Arendt's Work: On the Architecture of the *Human Condition*," 25-27; Zerilli, *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom*, 21-22, 105.

<sup>10</sup> Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin, 1963), hereafter "OR"

worldly entity” (OR 157). Arendt emphasizes the objective nature of the American Constitution so as to separate it from any notion of collective will or homogenous agency. While the people are the source of the power that animates the institutional space formed by the Constitution, they are not, for Arendt, what gives the Constitution its specific function. Rather, she says, the importance of the Constitution was that it was “a written document, an durable objective thing, which, to be sure, one could approach from many different angles and upon which one could impose many different interpretations, which one could change and amend in accordance with circumstances, but which nevertheless was never a subjective state of mind, like the will” (OR 157). One of the structuring narratives of *On Revolution* concerns the relative absence of such worldly, shared objects in Europe, objects that could open up a space for need and necessity to appear as possible public concerns. Instead, social needs tended to enter public life in an unmediated manner, which means they were never subjected to any sort of institutional reification into a tangible thing that could be the object of shared judgments. Thus, the fact that suffering was not transformed into a worldly object of possible public concern meant that the response was one of compassion rather than solidarity, an emotion which “abolishes the distance, the worldly space between men where political matters, the whole realm of human affairs, are located” (OR 86). Similarly, the French revolutionaries’ attack on hypocrisy rested on an effort to bring subjective motives, which “are destroyed in their essence through appearance” (OR 96), into the political world without a mediating transformation into worldly interests.

Nonetheless, Arendt thinks there existed some important, albeit limited, mediating and worldly institutional structures in Europe. In place of a worldly object like the American Constitution, European society was stabilized by “interest, the solid structure of a class society” (OR 163). We should pause briefly to consider the strangeness of Arendt’s claim here. While she

echoes their concern with stability, Arendt's view has none of the functionalist overtones of Hegelian social-integrative accounts of class as potentially cultivating consensual or non-instrumental values.<sup>11</sup> Nor does Arendt point to the role of class in producing a political elite capable of exercising political leadership—the problem at the center of Max Weber's view of the relationship between class and stability (Weber 1946, 1994).<sup>12</sup> Rather, Arendt points to “interest” as the avenue by which class contributed to social stability—the aspect of class that would seem the least political, especially given Arendt's supposed hostility to economic and social interests, and so furthest from providing a worldly object like the Constitution. At this point, though, Arendt gives her distinctive and idiosyncratic interpretation of the nature of such interests: “this interest,” she writes, “was never an expression of will, but, on the contrary, the manifestation of the world or rather of those parts of the world which certain groups...or classes had in common because they were situated between them” (OR 163-164). As with the Constitution, class interests are not a product of the will—of either subjective belief or else objective class-consciousness that could, say, be represented by a party—but a worldly, tangible thing that at once unites and separates people, arising from a shared space in the world. Thus, while interests are produced by economic and social needs, they are not reducible to them. And this is because interests are always also the manifestation of the world, of how such needs are reified into worldly objects—interests—that open up a space of common appearance and judgment.

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<sup>11</sup> On the influence of this idea on Arendt, see Roy T. Tsao, "Arendt and the Modern State: Variations on Hegel in *the Origins of Totalitarianism*," *Review of Politics* 66 (2004).

<sup>12</sup> Weber, "Parliament and Government in Germany under a New Political Order."; "Politics as a Vocation." To be sure, this does not mean that Arendt is free of elitist assumptions, as when she worries that “there is no class left, no aristocracy of either a political or spiritual nature from which a restoration of the other capacities of man could start anew” (HC 5), or her statement that among “present-day worries” is that “of how to prevent the poor of yesterday from developing their own code of behavior and from imposing it on the body politic, once they have become rich” (OR 70). However, I think her elitist prescriptions, while problematic on their own, are more fundamentally driven by the reductive analysis of mass society that I challenge below.

But how exactly can we conceptualize class and interests as manifestations of the world and still retain their analytic force for understanding society? In focusing on their worldly dimension, Arendt's account risks divorcing both interest and class from any association with economic considerations—of class to needs and risks arising from different relative economic locations and of interests to the instrumental pursuit of economic imperatives. Here the connection to Arendt's understanding of work proves crucial. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt identifies interests with “the matters of the world of things in which men move, which physically lies between them and out of which arise their specific, objective, worldly interests. These interests constitute, in the word’s most literal sense, something which *inter-est*, which lies between people and therefore can relate and bind them together” (HC 182, emphasis in original). These objective things, Arendt notes, “varies with each group of people” who act in relationship to them (HC 182). Does this mean that such things are just given by the contingent circumstances into which people are thrown? To an extent, yes. But as *things*, as objects, they will always be the product of work and so, according to the logic of Arendt’s account, related to the demands of economic necessity. Indeed, one of the crucial functions of work is to transform “the naked greed of desire” and “the desperate longing of needs” into things that “are fit to enter the world” (HC 168).<sup>13</sup> As such, interests will have the same double-face as all objects. They will at once be born out of the specific material needs and structural risks scholars typically associate with class and economic interest, just as everyday objects always retain their association with instrumental purposes. But as objectified transformations of those subjective needs, they will

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<sup>13</sup> I take it Arendt exaggerates for rhetorical effect when she says that interests, as she understands them, “have no connotation of material needs or greed.” Hannah Arendt, “The Great Tradition I. Law and Power,” *Social Research* 74, no. 3 (2007): 722. I think Arendt here is trying to push back against moralized critiques of interest that, in associating them with greed and material needs, seek to elevate worldless criteria for evaluating the disinterestedness of public action (cf. Arendt’s discussion of goodness at HC 73-78).

also be judged according to standards that exceed mere instrumentality and thereby hold open a space in which they and others can appear. Class, in this view, is constituted by economic structures without being reducible to them. And this is because material necessity can never appear as such but must be given a worldly shape.

The final element of Arendt's understanding of the worldly dimensions of the economic is property. Property, Arendt writes, is "the privately owned share of a common world and therefore is the most elementary political condition for man's worldliness" (HC 253). As with both class and interest, Arendt attempts to recover a more fundamental worldly, and so mediating, significance of property over and against its reductive association with economic instrumentality and material needs. Thus, while in the self-understanding of the ancient Greeks private property was almost entirely bound up with necessity and mastery, Arendt identifies that only as the "privative" trait of privacy—privacy from this perspective means "to be deprived of things essential to a truly human life" (HC 58). While Arendt appears to think this understanding captures some important experiences—the association between privacy and "things that need to be hidden" (HC 73)—it also leads to the reduction of property to the isolated domain of "force and violence" required to master necessity (HC 31). She then goes on to distinguish the non-privative traits of privacy from this association with instrumental and technical mastery:

The non-privative trait of the household realm originally lay in its being the realm of birth and death which must be hidden from the public realm because it harbors the things hidden from human eyes and impenetrable to human knowledge. It is hidden because man does not know where he comes from when he is born and where he goes when he dies (HC 62-63).

Arendt's picture of the non-privative trait of privacy captures aspects of property neglected by the ancient Greek understanding of the private mastery of necessity. Here, the private is not the domain of things that concern myself rather than others, nor is it a matter of things that can be technically mastered as opposed to those that call for a variety of perspectives. Indeed, the private signifies those aspects of the human world that escape our capacity for both conceptual and literal production and mastery.

The non-privative traits of privacy also alter the significance of property for politics. While in the Greek conception privacy was necessary because it liberated citizens from material necessity, here property becomes a pre-condition for public appearance:

Not the interior realm, which remains hidden and of no public significance, but its exterior appearance is important for the city as well, and it appears in the realm of the city through the boundaries between one household and the other (HC 63).

Property, here, is a worldly location, one that provides an opening into a common space of appearance while also distinguishing one household from another.<sup>14</sup> Much like class and interest, then, Arendt's distinctive interpretation of property strives to at once capture its economic dimensions without reducing it to its most obviously economic aspect—the right of dominion over a certain set of things or goods. Rather, what Arendt points to as crucial about property is precisely how, while bound up with the private concerns of material necessity, it is always more than merely economic, mediating between the satisfaction of needs and the appearance of things in public.

On this basis, Arendt attacks liberal understandings of property. “The distinguishing mark of modern political and economic theory...in so far as it regards private property as a

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<sup>14</sup> cf. Markell, "Arendt's Work: On the Architecture of *the Human Condition*," 26.

crucial issue,” she writes, “has been its stress upon the private activities of property-owners and their need of government protection for the sake of accumulation of wealth at the expense of the tangible property itself” (HC 71-72). Wealth, in Arendt’s view, refers to property only as a bundle of consumable goods or instrumental objects, thus reflecting only that side of property that it relates it to material necessity and the technical management of needs. So, a society can be at once wealthy—abundant in material goods and even having government protection for the private ownership of wealth—and still lack property, understood as tangible, worldly locations (cf. HC 61). The liberal defense of privacy in terms of the accumulation of wealth, which entails the unrestricted right to dispose over a domain of goods, obscures the worldly aspect of property Arendt thinks is most vital—that it forms part of the durable context within which both individuals and common things can appear to be discussed and judged.

Indeed, the modern, liberal view not only obscures the connection between privacy and a worldly location from which to appear; it also eliminates the fuller significance of everyday objects that Arendt reconstructs in her account of work. In a footnote on Marx’s awareness of world alienation, Arendt approvingly cites his view that the liberal understanding of property “considers things only as properties and properties only as exchange objects” (HC 254). The reductive understanding of property as ownership turns things into abstract properties disconnected from both use and, more importantly, the worldly question of appearances. With this view in mind, then, Arendt’s understanding of property as a “location in a particular part of the world” (HC 61) is crucially bound up with her recovery of the full significance of everyday objects and economic activities. Much like all things, then, property in Arendt is both economic—a domain separated from the public realm because concerned with the instrumental satisfaction of material needs material—and more than merely instrumental because also a

location with an outer face, one that appears and opens up onto the public. Once property is reduced to mere ownership and dominion, it loses this mediating function and thereby its role in contributing to the constitution and ongoing stabilization of a shared world.

In sum, Arendt performs a similar conceptual operation on class, interest, and property, with each illuminating the other. Against reductively economic interpretations, she attempts to recover and explicate the role each phenomenon plays in mediating between economic necessity and the world of common affairs. And this entails recovering the worldly dimensions of the economic phenomenon in question. In each case, modern perplexities come from a failure to grasp the worldly aspect of the phenomenon in question, reducing them to their privative and subjective side—class as either an objective, structural characteristic or a subjective form of consciousness, interest as subjective preferences, and property as things at the subjective disposition of an individual or collective. I have considered each concept at some length because it is only against this background that we can understand the full significance of Arendt’s analysis of expropriation. For Arendt, the central characteristic of expropriation is the destruction of the worldly dimension of the economic, and the failure of the modern theoretical response to that expropriation, one that begins from a view of economic activities as entirely technical and instrumental, is its inability to articulate what we have lost—and so what we could regain.

#### Interpreting Modern Capitalism: Expropriation, World Alienation, and the Welfare State

The foregoing sections have argued that Arendt, far from seeking to separate the political from the instrumental domain of economic activities, is centrally concerned to recover the worldly dimensions of economic activity. One implication is that any political theory that reduces economic matters to technical calculation and instrumental mastery reinforces the very developments Arendt seeks to diagnose. Yet few political thinkers are as associated as Arendt

with the view that economic questions are technical matters, best solved by experts. Indeed, Arendt's careful analysis of the non-instrumental aspect of every use-object insofar as it appears—and of the dangers posed to worldly stability when those appearances are ignored in favor of mere technical calculation—seems contradicted by her insistence elsewhere that there “are things where the right measures can be figured...and are not subject to public debate.”<sup>15</sup> What explains Arendt's failure to pursue her insights into the non-instrumental and worldly dimensions of everyday objects and economic activities and to rather assert such a strong divide between the economic and the political?

Here, I argue that this failure is not primarily philosophical or conceptual but rather arises from the internal structure of Arendt's sociological analysis of mass society. Central to her account of totalitarianism, Arendt's understanding of mass society, I contend, rests on an exaggerated and undifferentiated view of expropriation as the institutionally unmediated destruction of stable, worldly locations. In her analysis, the rise of modern mass society follows on the release of quasi-natural economic processes from the worldly institutional structures that previously constrained and mediated them. However, Arendt account of these processes tends to present them as de-personalized and automatic, neglecting both the social agents who historically propelled expropriation and the institutional structures that enabled those agents. Her disregard of these aspects of expropriation leads Arendt to view economic forces in modern, mass society as entirely unmediated and unworldly and, as a result, to restrict her analysis of the possible sources of worldliness to the domain of art and culture. Finally, Arendt's neglect of the institutional mediations of modern economic processes leads her to a deeply ambivalent attitude towards the modern welfare state. Even as she expresses support for welfare institutions, Arendt

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<sup>15</sup> Hannah Arendt, "On Hannah Arendt," in *Hannah Arendt: The Recovery of the Public World*, ed. Melvyn A. Hill (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), 317.

interprets them only as external checks on economic forces rather than as efforts to restore the stable worldly locations for and institutional mediations of economic activities in contemporary societies. However, if we view expropriation as always requiring institutional mechanisms and group agency to carry it through, Arendt's own account of the worldly dimension of economic activities and processes provides resources to counter this pessimistic view, allowing us to see welfare institutions as objects that, even as they are bound up with the demands of material accumulation, create worldly bulwarks against expropriation and open up political spaces of appearance and judgment.

In *The Human Condition*, Arendt identifies expropriation as one of three events that set off what she calls the modern age, alongside the discovery of America and the invention of the telescope. And she points in particular to the expropriation of monastic possessions during the Reformation, an event that sparked “the two-fold process of individual expropriation and the accumulation of social wealth [in contrast to property]” (HC 248). Expropriation, in Arendt’s terms, refers to the transformations that leave individuals materially dependent solely on selling their labor or, alternately, the returns from capital investments. In this view, expropriation thus always requires some attenuation or elimination of the worldly, stabilizing mediations of economic activities, as such mediations are always, to an extent, beyond the reach of market forces and of instrumental economic imperatives. So, the expropriation of monastic properties, which brought those material goods entirely into the domain of the market and accumulation, created a new population of bourgeois, absentee landowners seeking to maximize returns on their capital. Unimpeded by pre-existing networks of feudal obligations, these landowners were free to invest capital so as to increase agricultural productivity. And here we find the source of Arendt’s two-fold process: depressed food prices increasingly expropriated both the peasantry, who now

had to sell their labor for wages, and the gentry, while capital demanded more and new opportunities for investment.

In Arendt's terminology, the expropriation of monastic possessions transformed property into wealth, which is in turn different from capital. The full significance of these events is obscured because of "the modern equation of property and wealth on one side and propertylessness and poverty in the other" (HC 61). As we have seen, while property is always tied to a concrete location in the world, wealth is just that side of property linked to control over goods and to material necessity: "wealth remains something to be used and consumed no matter how many individual life-spans it may sustain" (HC 68). Thus, accumulation requires the transformation of property into wealth—precisely what Arendt understands by expropriation. Only as wealth—as the exclusive right to dispose over goods as one sees fit—can property be invested as capital and so generate ongoing accumulation and growth. "Expropriation," she writes, "the deprivation of certain groups of their place in the world and their naked exposure to the exigencies of life, created both the original accumulation of wealth and the possibility of transforming this wealth into capital through labor" (HC 255).

Expropriation, in sum, entails the destruction of the worldly mediations of economic activities. This is further reinforced by the event on which Arendt focuses: the Reformation's reaction to the Catholic Church, which Arendt interprets, in part, as an anti-worldly reaction to the tangible, worldly presence of ecclesiastical property. While ultimately grounded in "an other-worldly concern," the "grandiose splendor attending everything sacred" nonetheless preserved the worldly experience of moving from a hidden, privative domain into a shared space of appearance (HC 34). In other words, the sheer useless splendor of the Roman Catholic Church preserves, albeit weakly, the experience of worldliness that Arendt analyzes in her account of

work and especially the work of art. Against this lingering worldliness of Catholicism, Luther and Calvin sought to “restore the uncompromising otherworldliness of the Christian faith” (HC 251), which demanded the expropriation of the worldly splendor of Church property. As Arendt interprets it, then, the modern age began with an event that destroyed the remaining source of worldliness after the fall of the Roman Empire, and the event was only powerful enough to spark the process of accumulation because there was such a mass of carefully preserved and tended worldly objects—ecclesiastical property—available to be transformed into use-objects, wealth, and capital.

So, by focusing on the expropriation of ecclesiastical property, Arendt further calls attention to the anti-worldly nature of expropriative processes in modernity. However, by focusing so exclusively on this single event, she leaves herself unable to fully account for a central problem: why this moment of expropriation had such a larger ramification than similar events in the past. After discussing the relationship between the Reformation, world alienation, and the rise of capitalism, Arendt then claims:

What distinguishes this development at the beginning of the modern age from similar occurrences in the past is that expropriation and wealth accumulation did not simply result in new property or lead to a new redistribution of wealth, but were fed back into the process to generate further expropriations, greater productivity, and more appropriation (HC 255).

But why was this occasion of expropriation different? While Arendt is hardly explicit, we can reconstruct a partial answer from her discussion of what she calls the process character of action. All acts, in addition to disclosing the identity of the agent and drawing them into the pre-existing web of human affairs, begin processes whose end can never be predicted or controlled by the

initial agent. “The reason why we are never able to foretell with certainty the outcome and end of any action,” writes Arendt, “is simply that action has no end” (HC 233). This is the case because every act is constituted through the unpredictable responses of others, whose actions in turn are both the continuation of the process begun by the original act and the beginning of new processes. And while Arendt never fully develops the point, she seems to think that the process character of action comes to the fore to the extent that durable, worldly contexts for action are weakened.<sup>16</sup> Such durable contexts channel the processes started by action such that they do not double back on the “islands of predictability...and guideposts of reliability” (HC 244) that protect human affairs. From this point of view, then, the Reformation had such an impact because the durable contexts of action were so weak that the forces of accumulation overwhelmed the remaining worldly bulwarks. Indeed, Arendt appears to make this point when she observes that “the process [of accumulation] can continue only provided that no worldly durability and stability is permitted to interfere...the process of wealth accumulation...is possible only if the world and the very worldliness of man are sacrificed” (HC 256).

However, the power of processes to overwhelm durable institutions is only one side of Arendt’s argument. The other is that acts become processes because they are carried through, sustained by the responses of others, responses that are always conditioned by the pre-existing flow of processes but that intervene and redirect them to form the “web of human relationships” (HC 233). From this perspective, we should look for the actors who responded to the original moment of expropriation by using the state and institutional structures of power to augment it,

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<sup>16</sup> I draw this from Arendt’s observations about the modern channeling of action into the initiation of natural processes, as well as her discussion of promising. Such considerations, I believe, are also behind her view that action, “the most dangerous of all human abilities and possibilities,” has presently become “the center of all other human capabilities.” “The Concept of History: Ancient and Modern,” in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 63..

giving it its processual character. Arendt, however, overlooks all the formal-legal, regulatory, and material transformations that were required to change property into wealth and to create a reservoir of expropriated individuals who could become laborers. Instead, Arendt views modern expropriation entirely in terms of a process that overwhelms durable worldly contexts, instrumentalizing all political institutions and objective things in terms of the demands of accumulation—the point at which her analysis becomes socio-theoretically undifferentiated, presenting accumulation too much as an unmediated, quasi-natural process. The focus on the process character of expropriation at the expense of the web of human relationships that sustains it has two important consequences. In the first place, it means the alternative Arendt poses—*either* a process of accumulation *or* a new, settled state of affairs—is poorly framed, as the original event of ecclesiastical expropriation *both* set off processes *and* helped created new state of affairs of actors and classes, such as the bourgeois, who sought to redirect such processes to their ends. Second, it means Arendt exaggerates the self-propelling nature of accumulation and neglects the worldly, institutional channels through which accumulation always flows, which, one brought into view, also point to some of the worldly *limits* to expropriation, limits reflected in the institutional structures of contemporary welfare states.

Here, I focus on one significant implication of this for Arendt's thought: her equivocal attitude towards the post-war welfare state. At times, Arendt expresses support for welfare institutions, but only on the grounds that they maintain the boundary between politics and unworldly modern economic forces, rather than because they restore, to some extent, the worldly dimensions of economic activities by limiting the scope of expropriation. In her 1970 interview published as "Thoughts on Politics and Revolution, Arendt says, "only legal and political institutions that are independent of the economic forces and their automatism can control and

check the inherently monstrous potentialities of this process [of expropriation and accumulation]. Such political controls seem to function best in the so-called ‘welfare states’.”<sup>17</sup> Here, she presents welfare state institutions as external checks or controls on economic activities and forces, boundaries that exist outside of these processes and that do not fundamentally channel them in a more worldly direction. However, because she views the welfare state primarily as a project of controlling unworldly processes of appropriation rather than restoring to economic activities some degree of worldliness, Arendt at other times equivocates and identifies welfare politics as furthering or augmenting expropriation: “Overtaxation, a *de facto* devaluation of currency, inflation coupled with a recession—what else are these but relatively mild forms of expropriation?”<sup>18</sup> While Arendt shared the view of many of her contemporaries that Keynesianism planning had successfully overcome distributive conflicts, an issue I return to in my discussion of Habermas, we should nonetheless note that Arendt downplays the political aspect of these different forms of expropriation. While, for instance, inflation may indeed be a form of expropriation, it is expropriation mediated through political and economic institutions that have distinct distributive and political dimensions; in the case of inflation, directing expropriation disproportionately towards creditors. More broadly, though, this means that Arendt never considers together the two sides of her analysis of her contemporary welfare state politics: the external, political control of economic processes and her call “to make a decent amount of property [in her distinctive sense] available to every human being”—that is, to think about what aspect of welfare entitlements and institutions represent both bulwarks against economic

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<sup>17</sup> "Thoughts on Politics and Revolution," in *Crisis of the Republic* (New York: Harvest, 1972), 212.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 211-12, emphasis in original.

expropriation and worldly mediations of economic activities, mediations that allow needs and necessity to appear as potential objects of shared public action.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, Arendt's neglect of the institutional and worldly channels of expropriation leads her to an exaggerated diagnosis of late capitalism as a fully expropriated mass society and, further, to an unduly narrow view of the possible sources of worldliness in such a society. Central to her analysis of totalitarianism, Arendt's critical view of the transformation of a class into a mass society—one bereft of worldly objects that can provide stability and orient action—dominates her post-war political perspective. In a mass society, individuals lack the sort of attachment to worldly objects and locations that could provide stability and orient their activities, a condition Arendt terms loneliness and that she thinks leaves individuals vulnerable to totalitarian ideologies.<sup>20</sup> Under such conditions, Arendt argues, economic questions do indeed appear as matters of technical calculation: “in our mass societies the political realm has withered away and is being replaced by that ‘administration of things’ which Engels predicted for a classless society” (OR 272). To a large extent, this is because the “experiences of worldliness escape more and more the range of ordinary human experience” and becomes increasingly restricted to the activity of artists (HC 323). The destruction of the worldly contexts that mediate material necessity means, for Arendt, that primarily artists experience the attachment to objects and projects that allow them to overcome the dangerous worldlessness and loneliness of laboring and thereby to maintain a concern for the shape of the world. Yet, as I have been arguing, Arendt only comes to this conclusion through an understanding of expropriation and of a transition from a class to a mass society that neglects the worldly mediations of expropriation itself. And once such mediations are brought to light, it is doubtful there ever can be such a total expropriation of

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<sup>19</sup> "On Hannah Arendt," 320.

<sup>20</sup> HC 58-59; *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1951), 474-79.

society, and thus that the experience of worldliness—of attachment to objects and of transforming subjective experiences and needs into tangible objects and interests—is ever so narrow.

### Conclusion

I have argued that Arendt, contrary to the view of many of her critics, is deeply concerned with the appropriate role played by economic matters in political life. For her, contemporary capitalist societies are marked, not by the ascendency of economic over political concerns, but by the destruction of the mediating institutional structures that render material necessity a possible object of collective deliberation and action. Yet, as we just observed, she fails to pursue her own argument and consider how welfare state institutions could play such a mediating role: namely, by transforming needs into worldly objects that constitute spaces of judgment and action. Even when she expresses support for the post-war welfare institutions, the overall tenor of her analysis presents social politics as furthering both an understanding of government as technical administration and the expression of anti-worldly, expropriative tendencies of modern capitalist accumulation.

Nevertheless, despite her own pessimistic conclusions, Arendt's theorization of the worldly dimensions of the economic provides valuable resources for considering the significance of social welfare institutions for democratic life. From an Arendtian perspective, welfare institutions—ranging from various forms of collective insurance to regulation of economic activities to direct public provision of economic goods, such as housing or material sustenance—work to transform the bare necessities of material need into the objects of collective action. They provide shared vocabulary and set of reference points for public deliberation about, and intentional action upon, the demands of material necessity. The reification of bare necessity may

take forms as mundane as an administrative record documenting an individual's situation and needs or as elaborate as the construction of a housing project. Through this transformation of bare necessity into a possible object of public action, welfare institutions promise to restore a worldly mediation to economic activities and so a limit to expropriation in capitalist society, placing certain forms of property beyond the reach of accumulation and thus providing individuals with a stable share of a common world. A pension, for example, can be fruitfully viewed as a worldly *object*—something that not only satisfies material needs of citizens but that also provides such citizens with a stable location in the world and a measure of glory or public esteem—as well as a worldly *interest*—something constitutive of a class of individuals who share a particular location in the world relative to a shared object.

Arendt's analysis of the worldly dimensions of the economic helps to relativize and displace the terms of Weber's theoretical approach. The basic terms of Weber's thought—most centrally, the opposition between non-instrumental values and the material world of instrumentality—presupposes the very loss of worldly attachments and mediations that, for Arendt, are the precondition for our collective, active involvement in the world. Yet, for Arendt, these worldly attachments are still available to us, even as the inherited theoretical perspective of the tradition obscures our experience of them. Beginning from the theoretical, the philosophy of value is compelled to work back towards the meaningfulness of the world, subjectivizing such meaning in the process. Weber's call for personality and charismatic leadership demonstrates the political consequences of the tradition's social ontology when it confronts mass democracy. Moreover, just as, for Arendt, the inherited viewpoint of the tradition obscures our ordinary experiences of worldliness, leaving us with no vocabulary in which to express them, so too does Weber's theoretical perspective obscure the worldly aspects of workers' participation in the

German welfare state. Even as socialists recognized that Bismarck's intention was to transform the political demands of workers into technically controllable social needs, they were able to engage with these welfare institutions as worldly, mediating structures by insisting that workers and activists play an active role in their democratic administration. In this regard, such institutions functioned to mediate certain bare necessities—in the case of sickness insurance, biological life itself—so as to transform them into the possible objects both of technical management and of collective judgment and action. These workers and activists, increasingly participating in the administration of these institutions, were not just concerned to disrupt authoritative patterns for interpreting the interests of workers: more fundamentally, they sought to ensure that such institutions were structured so as to bring out the worldly, non-instrumental aspect of these interests, thus constituting spaces of appearance, judgment, and participation. Workers thus took up Bismarck's unacknowledged invitation to judge his work, responding to what he initiated so as to create new, worldly sites of public appearance and judgment, and thereby to open up unforeseen horizons of democratic action.

## **Chapter 5. The Causality of Fate: Jürgen Habermas and the Critique of Domination**

In this chapter, I examine the critical theory of Jürgen Habermas to develop an account of political struggles over welfare institutions as struggles against domination. Habermas's thought, I contend, is concerned not just with the normative rejection of domination as violating the strictures of discourse ethics, but also, and more centrally, with the mechanisms through which domination is reproduced and sustained. As a result, he provides a particularly sophisticated and compelling account of the sort of political practice required to transform relations of domination. Indeed, such an account enables critical democratic theory to escape the false binary of my opening question and instead analyze welfare institutions as social mechanisms that, even as they are implicated in the functional reproduction of domination, also open up those same relationships to critical political practice. Habermas enables us to see these political struggles around modern welfare institutions as a concrete iteration of a more general dynamic through which relations of domination are both sustained and overcome.

While Habermas's account of this dynamic is indebted to Hegel and Marx, his thought proves fruitful precisely because he is writing after, and grappling with the legacy of, Weber. Weber's thought, with its abiding influence on contemporary democratic theory, leads theorists to reduce welfare institutions to mechanisms for integration, discipline, and normalization. Yet, as the political mobilization of the German working-class helped to show, welfare institutions can become, against the hopes of their architects, sites of democratic participation and judgment. Indeed, Weber's pessimistic analysis of such democratic possibilities are themselves produced by the fundamental terms of his thought: and most centrally, by his reduction of the everyday to instrumentality and technical calculation. Weber presupposes precisely what Arendt seeks to challenge: the lack of the worldly, mediating institutions that can allow economic matters to

appear as objects of public concern. In pointing to how every attempt at domination—or, as she translates *Herrschaft*, rule—produces lasting objects that can become the occasion of democratic politics, Arendt shakes the hold of Weber’s conceptual categories. Here, I expand upon this line of thinking to consider a set of concerns Arendt does not deal with at length: the structure of the practices through which domination is sustained as well as overcome. Under what conditions, and through what processes, are entrenched relationships of domination subject to successful political challenge and social transformation?

The following, then, reconstructs Habermas’s critique of domination. In particular, I focus on Habermas’s account of what he calls, following Hegel, the causality of fate as the sometimes-covert conceptual engine of Habermas’s analysis.<sup>1</sup> The causality of fate refers, for Habermas as well as Hegel, to the peculiar objectivity of structures constituted through human practices. Habermas’s post-metaphysical reconstruction of the notion of the causality of fate enables him to analyze relations of domination as forms of self-objectification that generate their own (potential) critical overcoming through democratic practice—a dynamic Habermas calls the dialectic of morality. Thus, like Arendt’s account of work and worldliness, Habermas calls attention to the constant mediation between the material world and agency. Yet, unlike Arendt, Habermas views such self-objectification as a necessary component of domination that *at the same time generates the conditions of its own undoing through critical self-reflection*. Similarly, then, welfare institutions represent forms of collective self-objectification based on existing

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<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Bernstein goes as far as to deem the causality of fate the esoteric core of Habermas’s thought, one which Habermas found necessary to strategically hide behind a more orthodox Kantian façade. While my account here is heavily indebted to Bernstein, I do think Habermas, especially in his account of the rationalization of the lifeworld and his assumptions about the reliance of the dialectic of morality on structural domination, moves away considerably from his earlier analysis of the causality of fate. J. M. Bernstein, *Recovering Ethical Life: Jürgen Habermas and the Future of Critical Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 7.

balances of social forces that, at the same time, expose those relationships to the sort of critical challenge and overcoming Weber rejects.

In the first section, I examine Habermas's most explicit effort to generate a critical theory of society out of the critique of domination: his account of emancipatory self-reflection in *Knowledge and Human Interests*. Against critics who argue Habermas abandoned that account because of its intrinsic philosophical contradictions, I show that Habermas's analysis remains theoretically fecund. For his critics, Habermas's early account was an effort to answer a *what* question—what capacity grounds our ability to critically reflect on domination—and this what leads Habermas into a philosophical essentialism. In contrast, I shift our focus onto the neglected *how* question implicit in his argument—given that resistance to domination evidently does occur, *how* does it occur, according to what logics? I then show, in the next section, that Habermas moves away from his early account of critical self-reflection, not just because of its supposed philosophical problems, but also and more importantly because it presupposes that domination takes the form of structural domination—a form that, in Habermas's view, late capitalism has superseded and replaced with abstract domination. Thus, I argue that his partial abandonment of the critique of domination is contingent on empirical assumptions about the successful pacification of class conflict via a technocratic welfare state. Yet, as I contend in the third section, Habermas is also pushed away from his early model of critical self-reflection by his later efforts to secure the legitimacy of his critical efforts via his notion of the rationalization of the lifeworld. However, in the course of his analysis of this rationalization, Habermas also resorts to a second, submerged view of the lifeworld, focused on mutual interdependence, which has striking affinities to his earlier notion of the causality of fate. Furthermore, in articulating this second view of the lifeworld, Habermas resorts to the same model of critical self-reflection,

based on the causality of fate, which he had earlier developed. Finally, I return to Habermas's analysis of late capitalism, arguing that the notion of critical self-reflection enables us to reinterpret the political horizon of Habermas's thought: not the progressive unfolding of the rationality implicit in communication, but a politics of radical-democratic world-building as antidotes to the abstracting functions of de-worlding systemic media of money and power.

### The Critique of Domination in Habermas's Early Thought

*Knowledge and Human Interests* represents Habermas's most sophisticated early statement of his own reconceptualization of the task and foundations of critical theory.<sup>2</sup> There, he focuses his energy on an immanent critique of positivism, one that would be adequate to the objective location of scientific knowledge in late modern capitalism. And, crucially for our purposes, this immanent critique of positivism is meant to open up space for a model of reflection that takes as its central object of analysis relations of domination [*Herrschaft*].<sup>3</sup> Unlike positivist social scientific work, which, by applying the methods of the natural sciences to the social world, must assume social structures are given and immutable, critical reflection, Habermas's declares in his inaugural lecture at Frankfurt, would enable us to determine when "theoretical statements grasp invariant regularities of social action as such and when they express ideologically frozen relations of dependence that can in principle be transformed" (KHI 310). Thus, in contrast to his work after the communicative turn, Habermas's early thought places domination at the conceptual center of a notion of critical theory. As is well known, Habermas

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<sup>2</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. Jeremy Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), hereafter cited as "KHI".

<sup>3</sup> While Shapiro translates *herrschaft* as power, I translate it as domination to make the language consistent with my discussions of Weber and Arendt. This also makes it more clear that the emancipatory interest in self-reflection must be on a different level than both the technical and practical interests, insofar as it is an interest in the *abolition* of domination, whereas the other two are interests in the *achievement* of technical control and practical understanding, whereas the term power implies a more fundamental and ineradicable aspect of social life.

went on to abandoned the model of “constitutive interests” that grounded both his immanent critique of positivism and his own notion of critical reflection. In part, he was pushed in this direction by internal, philosophical tensions in how he constructed his theory of knowledge in *KHI*. However, I want to here reconstruct his argument in some detail to show that he moved away from *KHI* because of additional and questionable historical assumptions about the changing nature of domination in late capitalist society. In short, Habermas came to view, overly hastily, his theory as historically outdated vis-à-vis these transformations.

While I do not intend to provide a complete reconstruction of Habermas’s complex argument in *KHI*, I want to at least indicate its general structure so as to clarify what Habermas is doing by relating a notion of critical reflection to relationships of domination. While Habermas’s broadest goal in *KHI* is to re-legitimate critical reflection in the tradition of Kant and Hegel, he proceeds through a reconstruction of the genesis of his contemporary positivism from the failure of the critique of knowledge inaugurated by Kant. For it is the breakdown of the critique of knowledge, which sought to internally tie the philosophical justification of valid knowledge to the process of human self-enlightenment, that paves the way for the restriction of philosophy to the explication of the methodological techniques and presuppositions of empirical research. Yet at the same time, Habermas’s own theory, if it is going to live up to its intentions, cannot lead to a relativization of scientific knowledge through an implicit reduction of all validity to the domination of particular interests, as this would only reinforce the positivist assumption that validity and interest are fundamentally opposed. Habermas must still account for the objectivity of scientific knowledge without succumbing to the objectivist reduction of true knowledge to disinterested observation. So, while Habermas engages in fairly detailed epistemological

analysis, the focus of his analysis is re-opening the possibility of critical reflection vis-à-vis relations of domination.

To briefly summarize his reasoning, Habermas argues that scientific practice—here, he understands both the causal-predictive and interpretive sciences (what he calls empirical-analytic and hermeneutic, respectively)—is transcendentally constituted by the fundamental interests we have by virtue of existing as both material and linguistic beings. These interests, while constitutive and so transcendental insofar as prior to the objects of inquiry, are necessary or binding only in the weak sense of being “structures of a species that reproduces its life both through learning process of socially organized labor and processes of mutual understanding in interaction mediated in ordinary language” (KHI 194). Thus, empirical-analytic sciences disclose reality from “the transcendental viewpoint of possible technical control,” while hermeneutic studies “grasp [already-constituted] interpretations of reality” that can then become “practically efficacious” for members of a particular historical-linguistic community (KHI 195-196). In the case of scientific research focused on causal inferences, the validity of scientific claims can only be understood in the context of the practices of scientific researchers that are continuous with everyday, instrumental practices interested in the technical control of our environment. With hermeneutic research, the linkage between everyday and scientific practice is even closer: hermeneutic research renders explicit and reflective the interpretations implicitly relied on to maintain communicative action. In both cases, the objects of scientific study are pre-structured by the non-scientific social practices involved, and so scientific research can never be positioned completely outside the structure of interests currently prevalent in society.

Most simply, Habermas’s explication of the notion of cognitive interests forecloses the belief that the development of scientific knowledge represents progressively higher

approximations of reality—either through more comprehensive analytic-deductive theories or else Dilthey’s higher-level theories of social structures that are meant to encompass particular hermeneutic interpretations. Yet the question remains open: even if Habermas’s argument surely dispels a naïve view of scientific research, how does it open up the possibility of critical reflection? Indeed, as Habermas observes, the notion of cognitive interests could just as easily lead “a new objectivism,” one which reduces scientific knowledge to certain invariant social structures or pragmatic human needs (KHI 198). Taken on their own, there is nothing about the technical or the practical interests that would generate a critique of domination and so the de-naturalizing critical reflection Habermas wishes to validate. Indeed, empirical-analytic and hermeneutic science could be reflexive about its own relation to such constitutive interests and yet still naturalize hierarchical social relations.

So, Habermas needs an additional step to show how his argument for constitutive interests reconnects the development of scientific knowledge to critical reflection, thereby refuting the decisionistic stance implicit in positivist theory that critical reflection can only rest on subjective and therefore arbitrary value-stances. To do so, Habermas advances two addition claims—which together, I think, mark the point at which a theory of society enters his argument.<sup>4</sup> First, he wants to insist that the role of a priori, constitutive interests in the formation of scientific knowledge point to the connection between the development of such knowledge and a “self-formative process” for humanity (196). And, second, Habermas contends that bringing such a self-formative process to light reveals the dependence of cognitive interests on emancipatory practices that focus on challenging and overturning relationships of arbitrary domination. Habermas’s goal in developing the theory of constitutive interests was never to

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<sup>4</sup> Put differently, then, on their own the theory of constitutive technical and practical interests do not mark an overcoming of an ideological understanding of the sciences.

refound critical theory on epistemology, but rather to reveal the dependence of objectivity on the critique and potential transformation of social relations.

So, for the first move necessary to connect the critique of positivism to critical self-reflection, Habermas argues that his theory of constitutive interests points to the fundamental relationship between the sciences and the historical self-formative process of the human species. Thus, Habermas objects to how “positivism could forget that the methodology of the sciences was intertwined with the objective self-formative process of the human species and erect the absolutism of pure methodology on the basis of the forgotten and repressed” (KHI 5). By taking their as their starting point the methodological procedures of scientific inquiry, positivist theories must divorce knowledge from the “cumulative learning process” (191 KHI) embodied in institutional structures aimed at satisfying the need for control over nature (work) and maintaining inter-subjectivity (interaction). The increasing development of technical control and cultural reflexivity both generate potentials—for need gratification and legitimization—that point beyond existing institutionalizations of the technical and practical interests. Since, according to Habermas’s theory, scientific knowledge is only possible via quasi-transcendental interests embedded in social processes, so too is the knowledge produced by research inherently conditioned by the organization of power and interests in that society. Thus, if empirical-analytic sciences are constituted by the interest in the technical control of nature, they are going to have an inherent bearing on the institutional organization of instrumental action in society. The increasing capacity for technical control is going to generate potentialities that overshoot the existing organization of social labor at a particular historical moment.

Yet Habermas does not want to commit to the view that increasing knowledge, on its own, has practical consequences. Thus, while the development of scientific knowledge is

intertwined with this self-formative process, it does not itself constitute the process. Rather, the self-formative process occurs through the repeated unmasking and overcoming of relations of domination. Here, then, is Habermas's most radical ambition: to show that all scientific knowledge presupposes critical reflection in the sense of a critique of domination, thereby demonstrating that any account of knowledge that would render such critique either utopian or subjective is itself ideological. Insofar as both the cognitive and practical interests are inherently part of the self-formative process of the human species, they both presuppose what Habermas calls an emancipatory interest—an interest in deploying reason to demystify domination. He writes, “the technical and practical cognitive interests can be comprehended unambiguously as knowledge-constitutive interests only in connection with the emancipatory cognitive interest of rational reflection...only in this way can they be understood without being psychologized or falling pretty to a new objectivism” (KHI 198). But why is this so? Why is the emancipatory interest necessary to sustain the status of the other two interests, and not just a third interest alongside the other two?

Habermas advances this claim through a reading of Kant's notion of an interest of reason and Fichte's radicalization of that concept. Most simply, Kant needs to figure out how to reconcile the human capacity for free agency with the factual and historical determinations of that capacity, which presupposes a form of causal analysis that contradicts the undetermined nature of freedom. This dilemma compels Kant to introduce the notion that “in reason there is an inherent drive to realize reason”; that is, that we must have an interest—something that “follows an inclination” and so can causally explain our actions—in coming to be creatures who deploy reason, which, for Kant, presupposes the free, undetermined exercise of our cognitive faculties (KHI 201). And this must mean the unification of theoretical and practical reason, as “every

interest...refers to possible practice" (KHI 203). To put it differently, the very concept of objective knowledge, insofar as it presupposes a free, knowing agent, demands the overcoming of heteronomous social relationships. Although Kant was not able to fully embrace this primacy of practical reason, for fear that it would lead to an inherently partisan concept of reason, Fichte draws the full implications of Kant's argument. For Fichte, the interest of reason is reflected in the fact that objective knowledge presupposes a self-positing of the ego, one that overcomes all arbitrary, objective determinations of the self. As Habermas glosses the argument, "*self-reflection is at once intuition and emancipation, comprehension and liberation from dogmatic dependence*. The dogmatism that reason undoes both analytically and practically is false consciousness: error and unfree existence in particular" (KHI 208, emphasis in original). If objective knowledge presupposes a free, knowing agent, then the achievement of objective knowledge also demands the liberation from arbitrary relations of domination and unfreedom.

Habermas's is not committed to Fichte's a-historical, solipsistic notion of the self-constituting ego, but he thinks that the argument contains a crucial insight. Theoretical reason cannot simply be divorced from the socio-political conditions of its genesis. Rather, as both the perplexities of Kant's account and Fichte's radicalization show, reason, in order to explain itself and so to achieve true objectivity, must account for its own historical realization. Thus, without the notion of an interest of reason, the technical and practical interests constitutive of science could not guarantee their own objectivity, as they would then be confined to expressing the contingent constellation of interests embodied in a particular formation of institutions oriented towards instrumental control and practical understanding. The flipside of the notion of an interest of reason is that there is a potential "*reason that inheres in interest*" (KHI 287, emphasis in original). Just as reason must account for its own historical constitution through practical

struggles against arbitrary domination and heteronomous social structures, so too must knowledge-constitutive interests allow themselves to be subject to critical reflection. Only then can we determine whether or not scientific knowledge reifies social relationships, presenting them as objective and trans-historical, when in fact they could admit of practical challenge and transformation.

This way of understanding Habermas's argument—where the emancipatory interest is both presupposed by the other two interests and what guarantees the objectivity of the other two interests, rather than a third, distinct interest—makes the standard philosophical critics of Habermas's early thought less devastating. For McCarthy, Habermas's effort is beset by fundamental difficulties precisely because domination is not as universal as either the technical interest in the control of nature or the practical interest in intersubjectivity.<sup>5</sup> But according to my interpretation, not much hangs on the anthropological status of the category of domination. One need not view domination as expressing an anthropological need on the same level as control over nature and intersubjective communication, as self-reflection does not aim for the same level of disinterested objectivity as knowledge constituted by the a priori interests. Rather, the point of the theory of interests was to reveal the necessary historical interweaving of those disinterested forms of knowledge and interested practices of social critique and transformation. Similarly, while Habermas is surely right that he had not, in KHI, systematically distinguished between two

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas McCarthy, *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1978), 92-94. While McCarthy argues for an ambiguity in Habermas's use of the notion of domination, neither of his two alternatives—either a separate interest in overcoming domination or an interest “located *within the sphere of interaction*”—seem to grasp the distinctive role that domination plays in Habermas's argument. *Ibid.*, 94, emphasis in original. To be sure, relations of domination play out within interaction through distorted communication, about which more below, but it also affects the objectivity of knowledge constituted by the technical interest, insofar as that knowledge can ideologically mistake the causality of fate or the causality of nature (cf. KHI 256, 271, 310).

difference senses of philosophical reflection, the logic of the argument already presupposed those two senses. In his “Post-Script to *Knowledge and Human Interests*,” Habermas argues that the German Idealist tradition ran together two versions of reflection: first, a trans-historical reconstruction of the “potential abilities of a knowing, speaking, and acting subject as such,” and, second, a historical, critical reflection on the “unconsciously produced constraints to which a determinate subject...succumbs in its process of self-formation.”<sup>6</sup> In McCarthy’s view, this conflation compels Habermas in one of two directions: either an idealistic exaggeration of the connections between theory and practice, one that must ignore the materialistic critique of idealism, or else a dilution of the bonds between theory and practice, insofar as reflection on general, a-historical capacities will not speak to particular constellations of domination.<sup>7</sup>

This, again, rests on the assumption that Habermas construes the emancipatory interest along the same lines as the other two interests—that is, as something agents universally presuppose insofar as they engage in certain forms of practice or reasoning. However, as I argued above, self-reflection is not, for Habermas, a third type of knowledge alongside the other two, but rather a form of critique that is necessary to guarantee the first two categories of knowledge. Thus, Habermas has already, in the logic of his argument, distinguished between reconstruction—the form of reflection he enacts vis-à-vis the technical and cultural sciences—and self-reflection, which shows how those sciences are implicated in the self-formation of the human species. Self-reflection itself need not make claim to objectivity in the same sense as the knowledge constituted by the *a priori* interests. What McCarthy presents as Habermas’s irresolvable dilemma—either focus on reconstruction and retreat to an abstract, a-historical form

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<sup>6</sup> Jürgen Habermas, "A Post-Script to *Knowledge and Human Interests*," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 3 (1973): 182.

<sup>7</sup> McCarthy, *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas*, 96, 101-02.

of theory divorced from practice, or else focus on self-reflection and illegitimately identify critical practice with rational knowledge—actually identifies the necessary and productive tension that animates Habermas's understanding of self-reflection. Critical reflection is always a contingent, particular practice that nonetheless enacts a universal claim vis-à-vis the false naturalness of a relationship of domination. Of course, the insight gained through a process of self-reflection can not be universally binding on all agents qua rational agents, for it must refer to a particular experience of deformation and wrongness. Nonetheless, the achievement of autonomy that comes about through overcoming the false naturalness of domination makes reference to and can be evaluated by reference to the counter-factually reconstructed universal capacities and potentials. In short, self-reflection must be a moment of interaction between history and philosophy, the empirical and the transcendental—otherwise the reconstructed universal capacities would never take on a historical reality in determinate practices and forms of life.

Habermas's discussion of psychoanalysis further reveals the peculiar status of the knowledge gained through self-reflection. Habermas points to psychoanalysis as a science that, in contrast to both predictive and hermeneutic sciences, “moved in the element of self-reflection” (KHI 214). For our purposes, what is interesting is how Habermas discusses the validation of a psychoanalytic interpretation. In the most general terms, Habermas views psychoanalysis as a science of the neurotic symptoms of internalized domination, an internalization which provides domination with a pseudo-natural causality: “The institution of relations of domination [*Herrschaftsbeziehungen*] necessarily restricts public communication. If this restriction is not to affect the appearance of intersubjectivity, then the limits of communication must be established in the interior of subjects themselves...The analyst instructs the patient in reading his own texts,

which he himself has mutilated and distorted, and in translating symbols from a mode of expression deformed as a private language into the mode of expression of public communication” (KHI 228).<sup>8</sup> Thus, a psychoanalytic interpretation attempts to show how the particular neuroses of the analysand are produced by and connected to more general relations of domination that compel the internalization of needs that cannot achieve public recognition.

But what guarantees the objectivity of these interpretations—the question that animated McCarthy’s concerns about self-reflection? How do we know that the interpretation provided by the analyst will generate a form of self-reflection that will close the gap between the empirical and the transcendental and so further the interest of reason? Crucially, for Habermas, it is only the transformed practical orientation of the patient.<sup>9</sup> McCarthy, in contrast, assumes that self-reflection must be binding in the way that the *a priori* of the other two interests is binding. However, self-reflection can only make a retrospective claim to objectivity, in that the truth of the interpretation is only constituted through the patient’s ability to re-orient both their life narrative and their stance towards the future. The interpretation becomes true just through this self-transformation: “Whereas in other areas theories contain statements about an object domain to which they remain external as statements, the validity of general interpretations depends directly on statements about the object domain being applied by the ‘objects,’ that is the persons concerned, to *themselves*” (KHI 261, emphasis in original). Only “the successful continuation of an interrupted self-formative process” can validate the interpretation offered by the analyst (KHI 260). Even the explicit avowal or verbal acceptance of the interpretation by the analysand is

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<sup>8</sup> Translation modified (power relations to relations of domination).

<sup>9</sup> For a productive use of this insight in democratic theory, see Robin Celikates, "Recognition, System Justification and Reconstructive Critique," in *Reconnaissance: Identité Et Intégration Sociale*, ed. Christian Lazzeri and Soraya Nour (Paris: Presses Universitaires de Paris Ouest, 2009).

insufficient, as a superficial acceptance of the critical narrative could itself be a form of resistance. Rather, the truth of the interpretation must be judged relative to “the context of a self-formative process as a whole” (KHI 269)—that is, they must act as though they now recognize their former symptoms as produced by the internalization and naturalization of relations of domination and so, presumably, act to transform such social conditions.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the truth of self-reflection, while specific insofar as they refer to the particular history of self-formation, nonetheless contain a trans-historical kernel, but only insofar as they are validated retroactively through the practical stance of actors. Self-reflection, here, moves in the space between concrete historical developments and the universal claim of autonomy. Similarly, as Habermas says, it is only when philosophy retroactively “discovers in the dialectical course of history the traces of violence”—that is, the deformations produced by relations of domination—that “it further[s] the process whose suspension it otherwise legitimates: mankind’s evolution toward autonomy and responsibility” (KHI 315). In short, philosophical critique understood as self-reflection depends on, and is contingent on, its retroactive validation through practical struggles that materially transform structures of domination—and there is no knowledge independent of that interest in autonomy and reason.

Overall, then, the model of self-reflection Habermas develops in *Knowledge and Human Interests*, one that puts the critique and overcoming of domination at the center of critical thought, does not succumb so easily to the arguments of McCarthy and other critics. Indeed, as the preceding discussion hopefully shows, I believe there is a great deal in Habermas’s earlier efforts that remain viable and needed for a critical analysis of the present. Even as there remain many crucial ambiguities and unresolved dilemmas in that thought—most problematically, the

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<sup>10</sup> Habermas notes that analysis is “a word in which critique as knowledge and critique as transformation are not accidentally combined” (KHI 272).

substitution of the history of the species for transcendental consciousness—none of these seem to fully necessitate abandoning the critique of domination as the starting point for critical theory.

Rather, as I will now argue, what drives Habermas away from that framework is an implicit understanding of the historical obsolescence of the model of domination presupposed in *Knowledge and Human Interests*. In particular, I contend that Habermas came to see his earlier understanding of domination as too closely tied to Marxian class analysis and the related critique of ideology.

#### From Structural to Abstract Domination

While he never quite states so as such, Habermas's efforts in *KHI* are aimed at reviving the Marxian critique of ideology. Habermas seeks to refute the view that a critique of ideology is inherently vanguardist and must rest on a strong notion of false consciousness and Lukascian objective class standpoint.<sup>11</sup> Critical self-reflection along the model of psychoanalysis, on the contrary, shows that objectivity can only be achieved by collectively and democratically overcoming structures of domination that, at first, appear as a second nature and exercise a causality of fate. In the background of Habermas's argument is a historically specific conceptualization of domination. The understanding of ideology Habermas explicates in *KHI*—of what he calls systemically distorted communication—is specifically keyed to understanding the dynamics of class domination in capitalism. Here, I begin with the theory of class domination implicit in *KHI*—which I term structural domination. As Habermas's theorizes it, class domination in capitalism is a form of what I will call structural domination, a relation of domination mediated by the structure of the market—a form of domination that demands legitimization via ideology. I emphasize this implicit model of domination to then show that

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<sup>11</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, trans. John Viertel (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 1-41; "A Post-Script to *Knowledge and Human Interests*."

Habermas, in his subsequent work, comes to view structural domination as inadequate to the realities of late capitalism. In other words, he moves from an analysis of class-specific forms of structural domination to an understanding of capitalism that emphasizes non-class specific abstract domination. At the same time, Habermas abandons the critique of ideology (and, indeed, the entire idea of immanent critique)—as abstract domination does not require ideological legitimations in the same way as structural domination—and moves to the critique of functionalist reason, which focuses on fragmentation as the cultural form of abstract domination.

Habermas makes his conception of structural domination most explicit in the course of his critical reconstruction of Marx. In contrast to Marx's theoretical writings, which reduce the self-constitution of the human species to the dimension of labor, Habermas finds in Marx's directly political analyses attention to the “interdependent” development of, on the one hand, technical control of nature through “productive activity,” which proceeds in a linear fashion, and, on the other, “critical-revolutionary activity...through which the dogmatic character of surpassed forms of domination and ideologies are dispelled” (KHI 55). And Habermas presents his own theory as providing a firmer foundation for this second dimension of Marx's political view, an aspect of self-development Marx was unable to fully grasp because he remains “restricted to categorical framework of production” (KHI 55).<sup>12</sup> Although Habermas's criticism of Marx for neglecting communicative interaction and reducing society to labor is well-known, less remarked upon is the extent to which he here accepts Marx's analysis of class domination. Habermas takes it for granted that the evolution of normative structures occurs through the “antagonism of

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. "Labor and Interaction: On Hegel's Jena *Philosophy of Mind*," in *Theory and Practice* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973). See the helpful discussion of these issues in Seyla Benhabib, *Critique, Norm and Utopia: A Study of the Foundations of Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 44-69.

classes” (KHI 60). Indeed, Habermas’s attempt to restore the possibility of critical self-reflection is, at the same time, an effort to shore up Marx’s view that history unfolds through class struggle.

So, when Habermas speaks of domination *KHI*, he has in mind a specific form of domination: structural class domination. Domination arises because of the problem of “distributing the surplus product created by labor. This problem is solved by the formation of social classes, which participate to varying degrees in the burdens of production and in social rewards” (KHI 54). Domination, then, arises from the ability of one group to secure, through force, a portion of this surplus that is greater than what they could secure if the distribution were decided through free and open communication. Thus, domination here produces collective agents who stand in an antagonistic but mutually dependent and so morally charged relationship to each other—a fact that means class struggle is also a moral dialectic tied to critical self-reflection, which I discuss further below. However, such class domination is also structural, as it is mediated by market structures that mean individuals do not have to exercise direct force to secure their domination—the “anonymization of class domination.”<sup>13</sup> And just as the market anonymizes domination by institutionalizing power via the fictive neutrality of the private labor contract, so too does the mediation of domination by the market produce the possibility of ideology. The dominant classes could resort to claims with a “universalistic structure and appeal to generalized interests,” despite the inherently partial nature of their claims, precisely because the market appears as a neutral, apolitical form of social organization.<sup>14</sup> The fundamental conflict of interests and illegitimate appropriation of surplus value inherent in class domination is ideologically obscured by the structural nature of class domination. Since class domination exists even within the free functioning of the market mechanism, which renders no agent responsible

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<sup>13</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon, 1975), 21.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 22; cf. "Natural Law and Revolution."

for the final distribution of goods and which, by its own logic, produces fair outcomes, members of the dominant class can lay claim to a universal or general interest.

The model of critical theory Habermas proposes in *Knowledge and Human Interests* presupposes this form of structural domination. Without it, the argument for transferring both critical self-reflection and the notion of systematically distorted communication from the individual to the social level cannot get off the ground, and so nor can the critique of positivism. The pseudo-natural social regularities that positivist theory cannot distinguish from truly objective structures are precisely rigidified class relations structured by institutions like the market. Similarly, it's the phenomenon of structural domination that gives rise both to systematically distorted communication and, conversely, to political struggles that can generate self-reflection on the level of social structures.

Recall that Habermas, by taking psychoanalysis as his model, largely develops self-reflection in terms of the individual overcoming the psychic internalization of domination. Similarly, systematically distorted communication, as a linguistic reformulation of the notion of ideology, rests on the idea that the systematic social restriction of the communication of needs claims—needs claims incompatible with the existing social order—produces neurotic symptoms. The notion of structural domination, though, allows Habermas to argue that such distortions, far from being the idiosyncratic feature of individual psyches, in fact arise from the systematic structures that, to persist, must present themselves as objective and so as not based in uncoerced communications:

The grammatical relations of communication, once distorted by force, exert force themselves... The distortion of the dialogic relation is subject to the causality of split-off symbols and reified grammatical relations: that is, relations that are

removed from public communication, prevail only behind the backs of subjects, and are thus also empirically coercive (KHI 59).

Habermas's notion of systematically distorted communication is meant to explain this possibility for restricted communication to take on an empirically causal force: psychoanalysis provides a framework for understanding how "language and behavior are pathologically deformed by the causality of split-off symbols and repressed motives" (KHI 271). Systematically distorted communication can become a social phenomenon precisely because, in structural domination, seemingly objective institutions mediate class relations. Ideology, here, is translated into the idea that structures of domination transform what should be communicably redeemable linguistic relationships into apparently objective, grammatically frozen structures. Thus, Habermas glosses Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism as an account of "the institutionally secured suppression of the communication through which a society is divided into social classes," a suppression which "amounts to fetishizing the true social relations" (KHI 60). So, structural domination requires systematically distorted communication precisely because the structures that support it—paradigmatically, the market—split off symbols (prices) from their basis in reciprocal communication.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, Habermas wants to argue, such systematic restrictions on communication can be discerned in neurotic symptoms, which reflect needs and desires that are incompatible with the structuring institutions that mediate and support class domination. In short, the notion of systematically distorted communication only makes sense on a social level if you view domination as a relationship between two classes mediated by seemingly objective structures that gain their objectivity by covertly restricting the scope of public communication.

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Bernstein, *Recovering Ethical Life: Jürgen Habermas and the Future of Critical Theory*, 168-71.

In the first place, then, the notion of structural domination allows Habermas to take the concept of systematically distorted communication and show how it explains the objectification of the social structures that both support and obscure class domination. Conversely, just as the overcoming of neurotic symptoms requires individual self-reflection that enables the subject to recognize the source of such pseudo-objective causal forces in one's own life history, so too does the overcoming of systematically distorted communication entail self-reflection. Again, the implicit notion of structural domination allows Habermas to transfer his understanding of self-reflection from the individual to the social sphere. Habermas makes this clear in a significant passage in *KHI*, one that, more so than elsewhere, both brings forth the stakes of his critique of Marx and draws together that critique with his interpretation of the early Hegel. Habermas turns to Hegel to develop the “dialectic of the moral life” that Marx needed to make sense of class struggle but, because he restricted knowledge to a “theoretical-technical” form, was unable to grasp (*KHI* 56). Hegel originally developed his notion of the dialectic of moral life through an interpretation of Christianity that is, at the same time, a critique of the formalism of Kantian ethics.<sup>16</sup> Hegel’s account, Habermas argues, reveals the possibility of a form of “reflective knowledge” constitutively distinct from technical knowledge: while technical knowledge mediates between a subject and external nature as its object, reflective knowledge “mediates two partial subjects of society that make each other into objects—in other words, two social classes” (*KHI* 56). In other words, in Hegel’s dialectic of moral life Habermas finds a foreshadow of his own notion of critical self-reflection: like critical self-reflection, reflective knowledge in Hegel’s

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<sup>16</sup> For Hegel’s original account, see G. W. F. Hegel, “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate,” in *Early Theological Writings* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), especially 224-47. See also the excellent discussion in J. M. Bernstein, “Love and Law: Hegel’s Critique of Morality,” *Social Research* 70, no. 2 (2003).

account dissolves a false objectification and produces a recognition of the socio-historic, and so alterable, basis of pseudo-natural structures and neurotic compulsions in relations of domination.

For Habermas's purposes, what is significant in Hegel's discussion is how he conceptualizes, through the figure of the criminal, the relationship between punishment, guilt, and reconciliation. The central point of Hegel's analysis is that the criminal's experience of guilt is actually an experience of self-alienation: the act of the crime separates the criminal from the community, which, because of our constitutive dependency on others, is in fact a suppression and objectification of the criminal's own life context. Through his transgression of the community, the criminal separates from the "the complementarity of unconstrained communication and the reciprocal gratification of needs" (KHI 56). This complementarity represents a "common life context" between the criminal and those he has wronged (KHI 56). Those wronged seek to punish the criminal, a punishment that the criminal at first experiences as an external force but which actually reflects "the violence of the repressed...which he has himself provoked" (KHI 56). Eventually, through the experience of guilt, the criminal is compelled to recognize "in the repression of the other's life the deficiency of his own" (KHI 56). In other words, the criminal comes to recognize that, in treating the other as an object, he also treating himself as an object, implicitly conceiving of his constitutive indebtedness to the other as though it were an external, objective fact with no bearing on his subjectivity.

Hegel's dialectic of moral life, like Habermas's reconstruction of self-reflection, focuses on the subject in relation to the totality of the community. The dialectic of moral life plays out through the criminal-qua-individual's separation from the community, where his desire for individual sovereignty is purchased at the price of self-objectification and the denial of his own dependence on reciprocal communication. Habermas then suggests, however, that this model

needs to be transferred to the plane of class struggle between collective actors. If had fully distinguished cultural interaction from the development of the technical control of nature, Marx could have...constructed the disproportional appropriation of the surplus product, which has class antagonism as its consequence, as a ‘crime.’ The punitive causality of fate is executed upon the rulers as class struggle coming to a head in revolutions. Revolutionary violence reconciles the disunited parties by abolishing the alienation of class antagonism that set in with the repression of initial morality (KHI 57).

Here, then, the criminal is represented by a general structure of social domination that enables members of a certain class to extract an exploitative share of production. The ruling class, through its crime, alienates itself from the common moral context that is presupposed by its claim to legitimacy: in other words, there is a contradiction between the universal claims of the bourgeois and the reality of its crime. Revolutionary violence, although experienced like an external force, is the manifestation of this self-alienation. Such violence, then, compels the ruling class to recognize their own objectification. In abolishing the structures of domination that enable their exploitation and accepting decision-making on the basis of unconstrained communication, they can overcome such alienation and embrace the universal core of their claim to legitimacy—a claim which simply reflects the reciprocal relationship to the dominated classes that was in place before the appropriation of the surplus production. Thus, class struggle, Habermas writes, “is a process of reflection writ large,” a “repeated dialectic of the moral life” the results of which “are always sedimented in the institutional framework of a society, in social form” (KHI 61). So, in the first place, the idea of structural domination allows Habermas to substitute the two classes for the criminal and the community of Hegel’s original. Since

structural domination, as Habermas understands it, gives rise to collective agents, there are concrete actors who can commit the crime and so begin the dialectic of moral life. At the same time, since their domination is structurally mediated—that is, the ruling classes do not recognize their domination as domination but rather see it as the outcome of objective market forces—the dialectic of revolutionary violence can occasion a moment of self-reflection where dominating groups come to see and overcome their self-objectification.

The two sides of Habermas argument—that structural domination produces systematically distorted communication and that it can be overcome through revolutionary praxis that leads to self-reflection—are brought together via the notion of the causality of fate. Habermas describes both pseudo-objective social structures buttressing domination and the revolutionary struggle against domination as exercising the causality of fate. Systematically distorted communication, Habermas argues, can be construed as exercising a “causality of fate,” one produced by the “invariance of life history,” rather than the “causality of nature...anchored in the invariance of...natural laws” (KHI 271). For this reason, the apparently nature-like compulsion of ideology can “be dissolved by the power of reflection (KHI 271). Conversely, the punishment of the criminal, one that represents the force of the criminal’s suppressed life, also represents the “causality of fate”—and so too, by extension, does the revolutionary violence against the ruling class (KHI 56, 57). Thus, the process of self-reflection is first made possible because distorted social relationships generate structures that “prevail only behind the backs of subjects” (KHI 59)—that are forms of self-objectification and alienation. At the same time, however, that self-alienation produces negative experiences that, while at first also experienced as a form of external causality, induce self-reflection insofar as they reveal the initial distortion that generates the causality of fate. In other words, an abstract critique of the moral failings of

those subject to distorted relationships—whether in a dominant or subordinate position—is insufficient. Rather, they must experience a causality of fate that fully reveals their self-alienation in distorted relationships. Based on this insight, then, Habermas rejects the idea that simply pointing to intersubjectivity as an ideal is sufficient for inducing self-reflection. “Thus,” he writes, “it is not unconstrained intersubjectivity itself that we call dialectic, but the history of its repression and re-establishment” (KHI 59). That history of self-reflection operates through the causality of fate—a movement from self-objectification in hierarchical social forms through violent recognition of this self-objectification and to reconciliation and the reorganization of society on the basis of unconstrained, reciprocal communication.

In all, then, Habermas’s arguments in *KHI* presuppose structural domination as its object of critique. Without conceiving of society as class struggle mediated through structures that render domination covert, Habermas could transfer neither systematically distorted communication nor self-reflection from the individual level to that of collective action and general social transformation. Furthermore, as I argued above, Habermas’s understanding of self-reflection does not succumb to the standard philosophical objections to it—nor are there indications that Habermas abandoned it as a *philosophical* stance. Rather, as I will now argue, Habermas came to abandon the view that contemporary capitalist society could be meaningfully described as an order of structural domination. He came more and more to focus on what I will call *abstract* domination—a form in some ways continuous with structural domination but, in other crucial respects, beyond it.<sup>17</sup> While structural domination focuses on the mediation of class

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<sup>17</sup> Thus, for Marx, value represents a form of “real abstraction”—but, in Habermas’s view, Marx’s argument remains about the interaction between such real abstractions and class struggle. Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, trans. Thomas McCarthy, vol. 2 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), 332-43. For an argument that Marx abandoned class analysis and moved to an exclusive focus on abstract domination, see

domination by abstracting structures, Habermas moves to theorize the domination by such abstracting structures themselves. As I analyze abstract domination in detail in the next section, I only want now to indicate both why Habermas views structural domination as an obsolete framework and to sketch some of the consequences in relation to his argument in *KHI*. In particular, the move from structural to abstract domination as Habermas's critical focus leads him to reduce the significance of class conflict and so of both systematically distorted communication and self-reflection through immanent critique. In place of ideology, Habermas emphasizes the pathology of the fragmentation of consciousness, one that cannot be overcome through class conflict construed as a dialectic of moral life.

Throughout the 1970s, Habermas began revising the socio-theoretic underpinnings of his critical theory. While he would not fully declare class conflict a thing of the past until *The Theory of Communicative Action*, these transitional works find Habermas expressing increasing doubts about the adequacy of Marxian class analysis.<sup>18</sup> In *Legitimation Crisis*, Habermas argues that the increasing intervention of the state into wage-setting conflicts and the achievement of class compromise means that "the social identify of classes breaks down and class consciousness is fragmented...class compromise...makes (almost) everyone at the same time both a participant and a victim."<sup>19</sup> If everyone is, to some degree, a perpetrator, then class conflict cannot be the driving force behind society-wide self-reflection. In Habermas's analysis, the effects of class compromise are magnified by the rise of the education system as a new mechanism of social

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Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

<sup>18</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984); *The Theory of Communicative Action: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, 2, , hereafter cited as "TCAI" and "TCAII".

<sup>19</sup> *Legitimation Crisis*, 39.

stratification.<sup>20</sup> He speculates about the “possibility that...[the] differential exercise of social power could outlive even the *economic form* of class domination....‘domination’ ...would [then] be refracted...not through bourgeois civil war, but through the educational system of the social welfare state.”<sup>21</sup> In all, Habermas’s provisional analysis of late capitalism focuses on the decline of the market wage and labor-capital relationships as the institutional core of capitalism and the rise of social welfare institutions as new sites of social conflict, conflict generated by legitimization crises rather than economic crises.

This hypothesis about the displacement of class conflict, which I return to in more detail in my last section, compels Habermas to abandon the notion of structural domination. Indeed, since domination can no longer be traced back to concrete class actors, the source of pathologies in late capitalist society must be rethought. And so, in his mature analysis in *TCA*, Habermas now calls critical attention to “the reification of communicatively structured domains of action”—a form of domination that “does not produce effects distributed in any class-specific manner” (*TCAII* 332, cf. 352). As I already noted, such abstract domination is not totally divorced from structural domination: both are sociologically accessible from the perspective of the functional demands for the material reproduction of the lifeworld. Under the conditions of bourgeois capitalism, when the material demands of society are mediated through the free play of market forces and so focus around the systemic media of money, the material demands of society produced a concrete class hierarchy of capital-owners and wage-laborers. Thus, systemic imperatives played out through “strictly class-specific lifeworld” that produced struggle (*TCAII* 352). Abstract domination represents a further autonomization of systemic structures from the

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. the prescient analysis of these new forms of stratification Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class*.

<sup>21</sup> Jürgen Habermas, "Toward a Reconstruction of Historical Materialism," in *Communication and the Evolution of Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), 166, emphasis in original.

lifeworld. Now, both the media of money and power mediate the material demands of society, such that their effects are no longer structurally channeled into classes that stand in a particular relationship to the means of production. Domination, here, takes on a peculiarly abstract form—even as its effects are experienced as disempowering and invasive, it is no longer possible to trace it back to unifying hierarchical relationship. Habermas, however, does seem to think that abstract domination plays out through concrete actors—only now the center of gravity has shifted towards technocratic experts and their clients—yet he also often speaks as though the abstract media are themselves the source of domination. I return to these issues in the last section.

Habermas's analysis of late capitalism compels him to abandon two central planks of his early conception of critical theory: immanent critique and the idea of systematically distorted communication. These developments cut against each other: the decline of systematically distorted communication implies that hierarchical relationships are more vulnerable to open political challenge, yet the rise of a cynical bourgeois consciousness, immune to immanent critique, re-protects domination from normative claims. So, Habermas's first argument is that, with the move from structural to abstract domination, “[c]ulture loses just those formal properties that enabled it to take on ideological functions....the modern form of understanding is too transparent to provide a niche for ...structural violence by means of inconspicuous restrictions on communication” (TCAII 196, cf. 388). This is so because, as the state as well as the economy becomes increasingly divorced from lifeworld domains of communicative action, the discourses of morality and law detached from their metaphysical backdrops, making impossible the “global interpretation of the whole...capable of integration” characteristic of bourgeois ideologies (TCAII 354). As a result, relationships of domination can no longer be obscured by systemic

constraints on communication that carry the “traces of the sacred” (TCAII 354)—something Habermas thinks is characteristic of early bourgeois ideology. Late capitalist forms of consciousness, Habermas implies, are incapable of accepting the implicit restrictions on communication necessary for particularist social claims to lay claim to a universal.

Yet, whatever gains are achieved because domination cannot hide behind such structural distortions of communication are offset by the increasing technicization of bourgeois culture. Part of the effectiveness of taking structural domination as a starting point was that critical theory could point to the gap between the ideals implicit in structures like the market and the reality of class domination—a gap represented, also, by the negative moment in the dialectic of morality, one that gains traction from the difference between the reality of sundered life and the appearance of external punishment. Thus, Marx could “be content to take at its word, and to criticize immanently, the normative content of the ruling bourgeois theories of modern natural law and political economy.”<sup>22</sup> However, Habermas argues that, with the changes sketched above, “bourgeois consciousness has become cynical...[and] has been thoroughly emptied of binding normative content.”<sup>23</sup> The internal rationalization of the social sciences compels them to turn away from normative reflection. And this process is furthered by the functional role scientific research takes on in late capitalism. For example, while in early capitalism the function of the bourgeois social sciences was to legitimate the emancipation of the economy from state control, in late capitalism what demands justification is the “structural depoliticization” necessitated by the displacement of class conflict into the political system (LC 37). Such depoliticization is

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<sup>22</sup> "Historical Materialism and the Development of Normative Structures," in *Communication and the Evolution of Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), 96-97.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.; cf. "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1992), 442; Titus Stahl, "Habermas and the Project of Immanent Critique" *Constellations* 20, no. 4 (2013).

supplied, Habermas argues, “either by democratic elite theories...or by technocratic systems theories. In the history of bourgeois social science, these theories today have a function similar to that of the classical doctrine of political economy” (LC 37). Thus, even as the rationalization of bourgeois culture means domination cannot be ideologically legitimated, the increasing functionalization of that same culture nonetheless provides means for obscuring social conflicts.

Because of this cynical turn in bourgeois consciousness, the totalizing normative consciousness characteristic of bourgeois culture is replaced by fragmentation, which Habermas calls “the functional equivalent for ideology formation” (TCAII 355). Habermas introduces the concept of fragmentation because, despite the decline of totalizing ideologies, conflicts that play out between social and systemic forms of integration do not come to explicit consciousness. The fragmentation of consciousness prevents “holistic interpretations from coming into existence”—holistic interpretations that are implicit in the lifeworld but which never attains a level of articulation that can satisfy the demands of rationalized scientific domains (TCAII 355). Thus, the technicization of bourgeois culture noted above also prevents the formation of general diagnoses of social pathologies—most centrally, the invasion of systemic imperatives into the lifeworld—from the inchoate experiences of abstract domination. Of course, such fragmentation is furthered by the fact that abstract domination, as noted above, does not produce concrete classes structured via the market. Its effects are mediated through expert cultures and state institutions that further obscure, by preventing the formation of the sort of collective, critical political consciousness generated by class conflict, the dominating effects of systemic imperatives.

In short, under the conditions of late capitalism as he interprets them, critical self-reflection cannot take the form Habermas sketches in *KHI*. Without the structural domination of

early capitalism, Habermas cannot transfer the dialectic of morality to the social level of class conflict. While he still focuses on the critique of domination, Habermas's emphasis now shifts to reconstructing, through a quasi-transcendental analysis of the lifeworld, the pre-theoretical experiences of reification so as to overcome the fragmentation of late capitalist consciousness. Yet that project only makes sense to the extent that we believe the technocratic state has successfully pacified class conflict in late capitalism. If not—if abstract domination cannot fully displace structural domination as the defining feature of capitalist society—then Habermas was overly hasty in dismissing critical self-reflection and systematically distorted communication as key components of a critical theory of society. Before I turn to these issues, however, I want to focus on more detail on Habermas's critical analysis of abstract domination and his related account of the rationalization of the lifeworld. While so far I have been emphasizing the sociological suppositions of Habermas's move from structural to abstract domination, Habermas's problematic account of the rationalization of the lifeworld also plays a crucial role in his move away from his early critique of domination.

### Rationality and Fate in the Lifeworld

One way to see the issue is to note a curious ambiguity in Habermas's use of ideology in *TCA*. Habermas begins with a notion of ideology that focuses on the “ambivalent content of bourgeois culture” (*TCAII* 352)—a culture at once projecting an egalitarian, utopian image of society and fundamentally structured around class domination. However, Habermas, in positing that such ideological legitimization is no longer possible in late capitalism, quickly shifts to the terrain of “ideologically determined mass movements” of the nineteenth century, which, despite their obvious diversity, all rest on worldviews that take “the *form* of totalizing conceptions of order” (*TCAII* 353, 354, emphasis in original). The move to abstract domination makes

anachronistic, at one and the same time, both forms of ideology. Yet it is unclear to what extent the first form of ideology presupposes the totalizing vision of nineteenth-century mass movements. On the contrary: the first only presupposes, as Habermas makes clear in *Knowledge and Human Interests*, that abstracting *practices*, such as the market, both enable and obscure relationships of domination. While such practices can generate ideational structures, such as classical political economy, they do not necessarily presuppose the sort of totalizing vision of society Habermas rejects. All this is to say that there is no necessary reason that the decline of totalizing conceptions of social transformation will also lead to the decline of ideology in the first sense. Habermas runs them together because he wants to portray both as victims of the rationalization of the lifeworld, which, as we saw above, makes it impossible, in Habermas's view, that domination could insinuate itself covertly into lifeworld structures. Here, I want to turn to Habermas's account of that rationalization to call into question Habermas's linear story—a narrative that mirrors the linear move from structural to abstract domination.

Habermas first introduces his notion of the lifeworld as a pre-reflective background for the critical analysis of the social theorist—what Habermas calls the “methodological primacy of the analysis of the lifeworld.”<sup>24</sup> In *TCA*, Habermas presents the lifeworld as an unavoidable perspective that links the mundane activities of members of the lifeworld with the critical reflection of the social theorist. From this perspective, the lifeworld is the “more or less diffuse, always unproblematic, background convictions” that are available to interlocutors oriented towards reaching a mutual understanding [*Verständigung*] (*TCAI* 70). Much as with psychoanalysis in *KHI*, critical theory begins from inner-lifeworld experiences of fragmentation

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<sup>24</sup> Jürgen Habermas, "A Reply" in *Communicative Action: Essays on Jürgen Habermas's the Theory of Communicative Action*, ed. Axel Honneth and Hans Joas (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 254, hereafter cited as "CA".

and alienation and then deploys functionalist analysis to bring to light the subterranean sources of socio-political pathologies as part of a reflective process of mutual clarification—one that clearly echoes the view of mutual reflection between the analyst and the analysand, where the objectivity of an interpretation is only secured through the transformed practical stance of the patient.

Yet Habermas also contends, in *TCA*, that this hermeneutic account of the lifeworld as a shared, unreflective background is insufficient because it fails to ground the rationality and objectivity of critical social analysis. Habermas worries that without an account of the relative rationality of the lifeworld as a whole, theoretical reflection will be unable to distinguish between reactionary and progressive revolts against capitalist modernization. For instance, Habermas argues that because Marx lacks such an account of cultural modernization, he “has no criteria by which to distinguish the destruction of traditional forms of life [by capitalist modernization] from the reification of posttraditional lifeworlds” (*TCAII* 340). Notably, in the provisional iteration of Habermas’s analysis of late capitalism, it was the introduction of systems theory that guaranteed the “objectivity” of a social theory and allowed it to distinguish between “crisis ideologies” and “valid experiences of crisis.”<sup>25</sup> It seems that once he abandoned that reified account of system and lifeworld as domains of distinct types of social action and insisted on the methodological primacy of the lifeworld, Habermas feared he had also lost any criterion of objectivity. Yet at this point he could have returned to the practice-based account of the objectivity of critical reflection he developed in *KHI*. Instead, in his pursuit of a new guarantee for social criticism—this time through an account that is supposedly internal to the lifeworld—Habermas ironically moves back towards an externalized and reified account of the lifeworld, all

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<sup>25</sup> *Legitimation Crisis*, 4.

the while deploying a theoretical approach that has surprising affinities with the objectifying language of systems theory.

At the same time, there are internal tensions within Habermas's theory of the lifeworld which, if developed, could reconnect it to his early views and counter the linear rationalization narrative. In the course of defending his account of the rationalization of the lifeworld, Habermas shifts from an account of the lifeworld as an epistemological background that supports communicative action to a view of the lifeworld as the web of relations of mutual interdependence. In the first version, the lifeworld is primarily the taken-for-granted background knowledge that supports any single utterance.<sup>26</sup> Habermas wants to work up from this sort of weak, or what he calls quasi-transcendental, claim about the pragmatic structure of linguistic interaction to an account of the conditions of possibility of the lifeworld itself—an approach he terms transcendental-pragmatics.<sup>27</sup> From this starting point, he can describe modernity as the progressive development of these implicit but quasi-transcendental presuppositions of communication—developmental tendencies that further reinforce the shift from structural to abstract domination and the related decline of ideology. Yet, in the course of arguing for the unavoidability of these presuppositions, Habermas ends up also describing the lifeworld as primordially the relations of interdependence that constitute the scene of argumentation. It is the partial disclosure of such interdependence that makes argumentation a meaningful possibility in the first place. Particularly when he deploys the concept of performative contradiction, Habermas tends to highlight this second version of the lifeworld—one that, notably, supports the notion of self-reflection Habermas develops in *KHI*.

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<sup>26</sup> See TCAI 335-337 and TCAII 199ff.

<sup>27</sup> See TCAI 125ff. on the “*half-transcendence*” of the lifeworld.

Most generally, Habermas's account of the rationalization of the lifeworld is his defense of the achievements of European modernity. For Habermas, the achievements of European modernity must be understood *formally*, as a critical reflexivity about social norms and inherited traditions brought about by the growing prevalence of communicative action as a mode of social integration. As traditional and sacred sources of integration break down with the rise of capitalism, cultural traditions are sustained more and more by post-tradition modes of critical adherence.<sup>28</sup>

To develop his account, Habermas combines a micro-level analysis of the structure of communicative action with a corresponding macro-level claim about the nature of the lifeworld. At the micro-level, Habermas argues that when an individual uses language to reach a mutual understanding, she unavoidably presupposes the validity of her utterance along three dimensions: a claim to validity with regards to the “objective” world, a claim to validity with regards to the “social” world, and a claim to validity with regards to the “subjective” world (TCAI 100).<sup>29</sup> For action to be successfully coordinated through communication, individuals must be in implicit agreement (or at least have an implicit knowledge of the sorts of reasons that could be given if interaction breaks down) along these three dimensions of validity.

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<sup>28</sup> “The posttraditional understanding of norms is interwoven with a concept of communicative rationality that can become actual only to the degree that structures of the lifeworld are differentiated and members develop divergent individual interests” (TCAII 40).

<sup>29</sup> While this aspect of communicative action informs all of *The Theory of Communicative Action*, see the primary discussions at TCAI 75-102 and 273-339. Habermas's three worlds correspond to Kant's division of reason in the three *Critiques*, and like Hegel, Habermas is concerned with how to establish the unity of the three moments of reason while retaining the advances of Kant's distinctions. Everyday practice within the lifeworld, as opposed to absolute knowledge of the totality, is meant to restore this unity after the modern diremption of reason into its three moments. “[C]oncrete forms of life replace transcendental consciousness in creating unity,” writes Habermas. Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 326.

At the macro-level, Habermas argues that the linguistic reproduction of the lifeworld requires cultural reproduction, social integration, and the socialization of personalities.<sup>30</sup> While the lifeworld is the unreflective background for social practice, we can specify what it means for it to persist as a whole over time. These three necessary institutional functions for the reproduction of the lifeworld correspond to the three types of validity claims implicit in communicative action:

I use the term *culture* for the stock of knowledge from which participants in communication supply themselves with interpretations as they come to an understanding about something in the world [objective world]. I use the term *society* for the legitimate orders through which participants regulate their memberships in social groups and thereby secure solidarity [social world]. By *personality* I understand the competences that make a subject capable of speaking and acting, that put him in a position to take part in processes of reaching understanding and thereby to assert his own identity [subjective world] (TCAII 138, emphasis in original).

The rationalization of the lifeworld means that these three functional aspects of the lifeworld, and the three corresponding types of validity claims, are separated out. The three aspects of validity are institutionalized in the formal discourses of science, law and morality, and art criticism.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, the three functional components are increasingly differentiated into “specialized tasks of cultural transmission, social integration, and child rearing” (TCAII 146). In all, Habermas thinks this combined cultural and institutional differentiation provides the foundations for a posttraditional social condition, where cultural stocks of knowledge are

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<sup>30</sup> TCAII 126-152.

<sup>31</sup> TCAI 236-242.

subjected to repeated testing, social norms become increasingly abstract and formal, and individuals consciously adopt their lifestyle as an expression of their unique individuality.

However, in getting to this description of a modern lifeworld Habermas has moved quite far from the idea of the lifeworld as the unthematized background for communicative action. His aims to transcend the mundane activity of speakers in the lifeworld, which seems to require, like systems theory, taking up an external, theoretical stance towards activities within the lifeworld so as to provide a counter-intuitive description of the conditions of possibility of communicative action. Indeed, Habermas is clear that the analysis of the functional components of the lifeworld requires a move away from participants' first-person perspectives. He asserts that the concept of the lifeworld "developed from the participant's perspective is not directly serviceable for theoretical purposes," as it does not sufficiently demarcate "an object domain of social science" (TCAII 135). Instead, the concept of the lifeworld has to be reworked so "as to make possible statements about the reproduction or self-maintenance of communicatively structures lifeworlds [in general]" (TCAII 137). Thus, in reconstructing the quasi-transcendental conditions of the reproduction of the lifeworld, Habermas must break with the intuitive pre-understanding of actors within the lifeworld.

Unlike the introduction of systems theory, though, this move towards a theoretical analysis of the lifeworld as a demarcated action domain is not sparked by a concrete inner-lifeworld experience in need of clarification. Rather, the move is occasioned by the claim that these structures are in some way unavoidable for actors within the lifeworld, even if they are not intuitively accessible from the first-person perspective of communicative action. This is why the connection between the three structures Habermas distinguishes as necessary for the reproduction of the lifeworld and the three types of validity claims implicitly raised in

communicative action is so important. If these validity claims are unavoidably presumed in the first-person performative stance of actors within the lifeworld, than the formal structures Habermas analyzes do not represent a violently counter-intuitive objectification like systems theory. Rather, they retain a connection, however tenuous, to the pre-reflective practical activities of those in the lifeworld. Indeed, Habermas writes that individual speech acts used for communicative action “*simultaneously* take on the function of cultural transmission, social integration, and the socialization of individuals” because every individual speech act implies validity claims that can be redeemed along the three dimensions (TCAII 64, emphasis in original). In other words, we can gain access to these formal structures of the lifeworld theoretically because their seeds are always already present, however undifferentiated, in every instance of communicative action.<sup>32</sup> The unavoidability of these three types of validity claims is what allows Habermas to provide an account, then, of the progressive rationalization of the lifeworld.

But how does Habermas present such validity-claims as *unavoidable*? In “Discourse Ethics: Notes on a Program of Philosophical Justification,” Habermas introduces the concept of the “performative contradiction” as a theoretical mechanism for revealing this unavoidability. Initially, Habermas adopts an epistemological definition of the performative contradiction that fits with the quasi-transcendental analysis of the conditions of possibility of the lifeworld. One commits a performative contradiction when one puts forward an assertion (for example, “I do not exist”) that rests on “a noncontingent presupposition whose propositional content contradicts the

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<sup>32</sup> The analysis of these quasi-transcendental presuppositions is at the basis of Habermas’s idea of reconstructive social sciences. Habermas thinks disciplines such as developmental psychology and linguistics draw on these intuitively available and inherently normative structures of action and so stand between hermeneutics and objectivating social sciences. See Jürgen Habermas, "Reconstruction and Interpretation in the Social Sciences," in *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990).

asserted proposition” (i.e. existence is a noncontingent presupposition of saying, “I do not exist”).<sup>33</sup> At this level of generality it is unclear how much the concept can tell us about the concrete dynamics of rationality in the lifeworld. Indeed, Habermas notes that one cannot “derive basic ethical norms *directly* from the presuppositions of argumentation.”<sup>34</sup> It is not apparent, in other words, what hold the performative contradiction is meant to have on our actual practice, which does not operate at the sort of level that would allow epistemological contradictions to have much force.

As a result, Habermas seeks to refashion the concept of performative contradiction so that it can have a hold on practical activities. To this end, he imagines a dialectical encounter between the skeptic and the moral universalist, where the logic of the encounter progressively reveals the contradictory entanglements of a skeptical stance.<sup>35</sup> Habermas notes that the epistemological argument sketched above only demonstrates that there are “rules that are unavoidable *within discourse*” but cannot claim to regulate “action *outside* of discourse.”<sup>36</sup> To deal with this concern, he makes a surprising change of register: from epistemological contradictions in utterances to existential contradictions between the practical implications of skepticism and the fact that the skeptic is in a situation that demands argumentation in the first place. At the extreme, skepticism plays out as a refusal to enter into discourse with someone who asserts that there are binding moral obligations. At this stage in the argument, Habermas argues the skeptical withdrawal reflects a kind of existential, lived impossibility. The challenge of the skeptic reveals the *mutual dependency* that makes the skeptic’s stance self-defeating, as

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<sup>33</sup> “Discourse Ethics: Notes on a Program of Philosophical Justification,” in *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 80.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 86, emphasis in original.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 85-86, emphasis in original.

the skeptic may reject morality, but he cannot reject the ethical substance (*Sittlichkeit*) of the life circumstances in which he spends his waking hours, not unless he is willing to take refuge in suicide or serious mental illness. In other words, he cannot extricate himself from the communicative practice of everyday life in which he is continually forced to take a position by responding to yes or no.<sup>37</sup>

As a result, the most transcendental-pragmatic justification can do is point to this condition of mutual dependency that is *prior* to communicative action. In the end, as Bernstein observes, “[c]ommunicative reason can *express* this recognition [of our dependency on others] once made, but it cannot ground it.”<sup>38</sup> What grounds it, instead, is the prior “life circumstances”, the substantive ethical condition, which makes communicative action a meaningful and in fact unavoidable necessity for co-operative existence. Habermas seems to think that the *ethical* experience of the skeptic points towards the reconstructive claims he makes about the unavoidability of raising validity claims, which in turn grounds his analysis of the rationalization of the lifeworld. It is unclear how the disclosure of this mutual dependency is meant to, for example, show that we must embrace the division of reason into its three moments through the

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 100. In *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, Habermas makes the flipside of this claim, emphasizing the role that events like suicide play in disclosing this unavoidable mutual interdependence that constitutes the lifeworld. He writes, “the pseudo-natural dynamics of impaired communicative life-contexts retains something of the character of a destining for which is ‘at fault’ oneself—thought one can speak of ‘fault’ here only in an intersubjective sense, that is, in the sense of an involuntary product of an entanglement that, however things stand with individual accountability, communicative agents would have to ascribe to communal responsibility. It is not by chance that suicides set loose a type of shock among those close to them, which allows even the most hardhearted to discover something of the *unavoidable communal*ity of such a fate.” Here, again, Habermas uses the existential theme of fate to emphasize the unavoidability of communicative action and reason giving. *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, 316.

<sup>38</sup> Bernstein, *Recovering Ethical Life: Jürgen Habermas and the Future of Critical Theory*, 180, emphasis in original.

formal institutionalization of science, law and morality, and art criticism. There remains a gap between what Habermas discloses as ethically unavoidable and what he wants to defend as the rationalization of the lifeworld.

Notably, the logic of this encounter closely mirrors the dialectic of morality in *KHI*. In the structure of Habermas's argument, the skeptic occupies the same structural location as the criminal—an individual who, in attempting to construct a vision of sovereign agency, must also self-objectify by alienating himself from the conditions of his own agency. With the skeptic, he uses philosophical reconstruction to clarify the structure of what is initially experienced as the “causality of fate”, where the consequences of the skeptic's position—suicide or insanity—are at first experienced by the skeptic as an external force or fate constraining his ability to adopt his chosen way of life.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, more generally, aspects of Habermas's argument in *TCA* pick up the theme of the dialectic of morality and its central motif, the causality of fate, with systems theory giving Habermas access to the self-objectification he analyzed, in *KHI*, with the help of psychoanalysis.<sup>40</sup> Thus, Habermas's introduction of systems theory is motivated by the concrete experiences of diremption and alienation within the lifeworld, where the forces of systems are “felt as a *causality of fate* in the experiences and sufferings of actors” (*TCAII* 311, emphasis added). In both cases, the structural differentiations described by the theorist, whether they be distinct functionally integrated systems or the rationalization of the lifeworld, are both at first something *alien* to the pre-theoretical, first-person experiences of actors within the lifeworld—something that represents a self-objectification. The crucial difference, of course, is that

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<sup>39</sup> My discussion is heavily indebted to the parallels Bernstein draws between the performative contradiction and the causality of fate. *Ibid.*, 180-97.

<sup>40</sup> Indeed, Habermas explicitly says that the two perspectives—action-theoretic and systems-theoretic—were previously united in “idealistic dialectics” (*TCAII* 113). With this in mind, Habermas's effort in *TCA* at integration attempts to revive certain critical notions, such as self-objectification, that previously relied on the idealistic vision of absolute reconciliation.

Habermas introduces systems theory critically in order to delimit the appropriate scope of functionalist social science, while he adopts the rationalist claims of philosophical reconstruction without thought for the alienating and reifying consequences of the gap he opens between the philosopher's viewpoint and the perspective of actors within the lifeworld. Rather than mutual and reflective clarification, where the objectivity of the interpretation is retroactively guaranteed by its practical consequences in transformed practices, the social theorist now grounds his claims in the unavoidable presuppositions of communicative action that are revealed at first like an external fate.<sup>41</sup>

Indeed, Bernstein pushes the analogy between rational reconstruction and systems theory further when he observes that in their most extreme formulation, the idealized presuppositions of communicative action become, like the mediums of money and power, de-worlding. He argues that “[b]y requiring that the worth of norms be attached to what is unlike them,” that is, to the form of idealized argumentation, Habermas “empties the original empirical orientation of the norm of its original sense.”<sup>42</sup> As a consequence, communicative rationality makes no reference to the concrete content of the norms under consideration, and so ends up, like money and power, “rend[ing] various objects and practices effectively intersubjectively meaningless.”<sup>43</sup> In moving to a formal level of analysis fails, Habermas betrays his own insight that “as soon as subjects speak with one another...they counter one another with the claim to be recognized as irreplaceable

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<sup>41</sup> Habermas articulates the difference between these approaches when he describes the “two heritages of self-reflection” as “*rational reconstruction*” and “*methodically carried out self-critique*.” However, far from recognizing the tension between the two approaches, he thinks they can “still be brought together within the framework of one and the same theory.” Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, 300.

<sup>42</sup> Bernstein, *Recovering Ethical Life: Jürgen Habermas and the Future of Critical Theory*, 172.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

individuals in their absolute determinateness.”<sup>44</sup> From this perspective of absolute determinateness, the domains of institutionalized discourse often look like functionally integrated systems that disburden lifeworld participants from reaching mutual agreement. While Habermas insists that the “cognitive potential developed by expert culture...has to be passed on to the communicative practice of everyday life” (TCAII 240), his concern is only that the three domains are not too distant from the lifeworld and not that expert culture itself could become a form of functionally integrated power/knowledge.

Habermas’s blindness to this possibility runs deep in his account of the lifeworld. It centrally emerges from his belief in the idea of a non-reifying reconstructive social science, the possibility of which he fails to establish. In his desire to establish such a reconstructive analysis of the reproduction of the lifeworld in general, he transforms it from the pre-reflective background of social theory and into a set of institutions and practices that stand alongside functionally integrated systems. I have tried to show that this attempt is nonetheless instructive, as it Habermas attempt to ground the unavoidability of the presuppositions of communicative action reveals another way of understanding the lifeworld as a pre-reflective background. As we saw in his discussion of the performative contradiction, what Habermas thinks finally compels us to provide reasons for our actions is an existentially given condition of mutual dependency. The problem with skepticism is not epistemological; rather, it resides in the inability of a skeptical stance to acknowledge its implication in these concrete, intersubjective practices. The lifeworld, from this perspective, is the web of these relations of interdependency that give us something to talk about at all. Communicative action is indeed “a switching station for the energies of social

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<sup>44</sup> Jürgen Habermas, "Theodor Adorno: The Primal History of Subjectivity-Self-Affirmation Gone Wild (1969)," in *Philosophical-Political Profiles* (1983), 105.

solidarity” (TCAII 57), but those energies arise first and foremost from the ethical condition of human interdependence.

Yet it is not this condition itself that provides Habermas’s account of the lifeworld with its critical force. Rather, much like in *KHI*, it’s the negative movement that critically reveals, through systems theory and the account of interdependence, the forms of alienation and self-objectification Habermas groups together under the notion of reification. Habermas’s increasing concern to secure the rationality of cultural modernity, however, leads him to abandon, or at least downplay, this account of the lifeworld for one that focuses on the linear and un-dialectical unfolding of rationality—one that brings Habermas perilously close to privileging the same external theoretical perspective as technocratic systems theory. That second perspective further reinforces Habermas’s move away from the dialectic critique of domination and towards a defense of the functional necessity of differentiation in modernity. Yet, as I have argued above, even in his later thought Habermas remains traces of his earlier concerns with the dialectic of morality. Read together with his early account of the objectivity of critical self-reflection, this ethical conception of the lifeworld retains a critico-practical force. Beginning with inner-lifeworld experiences, critical theory focuses on diagnosing social pathologies, and such interpretations are validated, not in an overarching modernization narrative, but retroactively, through transformed practical orientations and the overcoming of relations of domination.

### Abstract Domination and Radical Democracy as World-Building

Thus far, I have attempted to reconstruct Habermas’s critical theory of domination, a theory he develops furthest in *Knowledge and Human Interests*. I then considered two interrelated theoretical motives for his move away from that approach: first, the view that late capitalism is characterized by a shift from structural to abstract domination; and second, a

defense of a cultural modernity (narrowly construed as the rationalization of the lifeworld) through an epistemological account of the lifeworld. To challenge that second pillar, I called attention to an alternate, submerged view of the lifeworld, one continuous with the critical perspective of *Knowledge and Human Interests*. I now want to return to the question of domination by examining, in more detail, Habermas's account of abstract domination. In the first place, I seek to dispel a common one-sided interpretation of Habermas, an interpretation that is reinforced by Habermas's account of the rationalization of the lifeworld. This is the view that the economic and administrative systems are spatially discrete domains of instrumental action, such that Habermas continues the early Frankfurt School critique of instrumental reason.<sup>45</sup> Such an interpretation obscures the true purpose of Habermas's deployment of systems theory: the demystification of abstract domination. From this perspective, I conclude, Habermas's account of the internal colonization of the lifeworld also appear differently: for Habermas, the point is not simply to defend communicative action against instrumental reason. Rather, the defense of the lifeworld requires an offense against systemic forms of integration, one that raises *transformative* questions about the relationship between systemic integration and lifeworld practices in contemporary societies.

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<sup>45</sup> Axel Honneth articulates this interpretation clearly: "There has been a tendency in the tradition of the Frankfurt School to accept the fact that instrumental reason has attained predominance over other forms of action and knowledge as constituting the decisive 'disorder' of modern societies. All occurrences and phenomena that might appear 'pathological' are interpreted here as consequences of a self-generated independence of social attitudes aimed at dominating nature. The same tendency is also continued in Habermas's work inasmuch as his draft of a theory of communicative action leads to a diagnosis of the times that proceeds from the danger of a '*'colonization' of the life-world by systems organized according to purposive rationality*.'" Axel Honneth, "The Social Dynamics of Disrespect: On the Location of Critical Theory Today," in *Disrespect: The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), 73, emphasis added.

As I noted above, Habermas's use of systems theory is subordinate to an inner-lifeworld analysis of concrete pathologies under capitalism. These phenomenological experiences of alienation and powerlessness demand, Habermas argues, an effort to grasp the objective forces that seem to buffet individuals from the outside. For Habermas, the sources of these experiences under capitalism can be clarified by provisionally introducing the idea of a self-maintaining economic system coordinated through the "steering-medium" of money and an administrative system coordinated through the medium of power. Systems theory apprehends social stability insofar as it arises from the functional interlocking of action consequences rather than from the intentional coordination of action plans through ordinary language. While markets may be by now an intuitively accessible social form that stabilizes itself through latent functions, the objective stance required to describe such latent functions is always an incomplete objectification in response to concrete experiences of alienation and powerlessness.<sup>46</sup> The important consequence of this, which I turn to now, is that the state and the market cannot be grasped as domains of instrumental action: Habermas's critical analysis of capitalism does not hinge on a description of the stance of actors—be it communicative or instrumental—involved in market exchanges or production.

Habermas at times states that the interlocking of action consequences coordinated through money creates a "norm-free" form of systemic integration (TCAII 185). Does this mean Habermas is committed to the idea that the economy is, from the perspective of actors, a domain of pure instrumental social action? Does he, as a result, project a binary between instrumental

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<sup>46</sup> As McCarthy observes, Habermas seems to be asserting that "latent functions, like background assumptions [in the lifeworld], are unavoidable and can never be made manifest all at once. Then systems analysis...would be an ongoing, unending task of self-clarification." Thomas McCarthy, "Complexity and Democracy: Or the Seductions of Systems Theory," in *Communicative Action: Essays on Jürgen Habermas's the Theory of Communicative Action*, ed. Axel Honneth and Hans Joas (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 132.

and communicative action onto two reified social domains called system and lifeworld? If the answer to either question were yes, it would raise serious concerns about the utility of Habermas's theory, especially its ability to analyze the cultural structures that support capitalist exchange relations. A careful reading shows, though, that Habermas does not think that the economy is a norm-free domain of instrumental action, as he only ever describes the *mediums* of social integration as norm-free and not the economy itself as a social domain or set of overlapping institutions.<sup>47</sup> He is at pains to argue that systems and lifeworld do not correspond to communicative and instrumental rationality: there is a tension "*not between the types of action* oriented to understanding and to success, *but between principles of societal integration*" (TCAI 342, emphasis in original).

Thus, Habermas affirms "economic and political contexts as a whole make use of communicative action that is embedded in a normative framework" (CA 257). Rather, his claim is that the exchange of goods (whether material goods or labor) using *money* leads to an stabilization of action consequences that operates objectively, like a second nature, whatever the reason individuals make the exchange: there is nothing about the act of exchange itself to imply that the orientation of actors is instrumental and so divorced from a shared lifeworld.<sup>48</sup> The functional role of the medium of money in that moment, however, *is* non-normative. Money is a "de-linguistified" (TCAI 342) mechanism for coordinating actions and as a result has "a specific

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<sup>47</sup> Although Habermas at times describes the economy as "a block of more or less norm-free sociality" (TCAII 171), I take him to include in the "economy" any instance or site that makes use of the medium of money. Indeed, following his statement about norm-free sociality, he specifies that the capitalist economy is distinctive because "internal commerce...[is] carried out through monetary channels", which seems to again refocus the norm-freeness of capitalism on the use of money (TCAII 171). See also Habermas's clarification of this terminology, which led to "misunderstandings," at CA 256-257.

<sup>48</sup> Habermas remarks that in instrumental action, actors suspend the assumption of a shared lifeworld (CA 247).

‘de-worlding’ effect” (CA 258). The upshot of this de-linguification of exchange is that it relieves actors from having to use ordinary language to coordinate their actions. A peculiar power of capitalism, in Habermas’s account, is its ability to transmit the complex intentions and information required for material reproduction through the medium of money and so without recourse to linguistic interaction or economic institutions that demand costly social legitimization, as in feudalism. Thus, the need for systems analysis does not arise because there is some distinct domain of institutions and social relations that operate in a non-normative manner—“systems integration also extends throughout contexts of communicative action” (CA 257)—but rather arises whenever individuals use a social mechanism such as money to accomplish a goal.

Habermas argues that the formal institutionalization of money focuses the latent functions of social actions around a clearly demarcated exchange medium, while in early social orders these latent functions are more complexly intertwined with socio-cultural norms and so more constrained by demands for legitimacy. As a result, monetary exchanges develop particularly powerful counter-intuitive forces that escape the shared horizon of the lifeworld. At the same time, Habermas speaks of the “structure-forming effects” of this institutionalization of the medium of money (TCAII 171). The initial institutionalization of monetary exchange had transformative effects on the organization of economic production, the household, and the state. In this regard, he points to the commodification of labor and the development of capitalist enterprise, processes that were “certainly not ‘painless’” (CA 260).<sup>49</sup> Thus, while the actual historical story was much more complex, we can clarify the pathological effects of this process of “real abstraction”, which shapes a variety of inner-lifeworld action contexts related to the

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<sup>49</sup> See also TCAII 171. Habermas fully admits that his account is stylized, as when he writes, “the subsumption of living labour under the commodity form is an oversimplifying theoretical expression for infinitely multi-layered and ramified processes that are far removed from the limiting value of completely commodified labour power” (CA 259).

economy, by focusing on the specific de-worlding structure of monetarized exchange. This process of abstraction transformed the underlying logic of material reproduction in a way that seems to simultaneously liberate economic activity from socio-culturally legitimate hierarchies while subordinating it to the domination of self-generating market regularities.

As already noted, this description of the economic system entails no commitment about the orientation of actors engaged in activities related to material reproduction and capitalist exchange. “Media-guided interactions no longer embody an instrumental, but rather a functional form of reason,” writes Habermas (CA 257). Nonetheless, Habermas does think that the spread of objectifying and instrumental attitudes are part the inner-lifeworld pathological experiences of capitalism—part of what motivated the introduction of systems theory in the first place. The saturation of the lifeworld by the steering mediums of money and power gives rise to a general objectivization of social relations—in other words, reification. These effects arise, Habermas argues, because de-worlding mediums have an “affinity to purposive-rational action orientations” (CA 258). Money is a viable steering-medium because of the *possibility* that one participant can use it to “affect the decisions of alter [the other participant] *in a purposive-rational manner*” (TCAII 265, emphasis in original). The increasing use of these steering mediums leads individuals to adopt instrumental attitudes, as the mediums deprive them of the need to use linguistic interaction to achieve their goals. Given certain conditions, capitalism does lead to the ascendancy of detached, instrumental attitudes, but only as a pathological consequence of de-worlding. For this reason, Habermas consciously echoes Marx when he says that while the use of steering mediums allows the actor to maintain a “purposive-rational stance,” it comes at the cost of “an *objective inversion of the ends set and the means chosen*” (CA 258,

emphasis in original).<sup>50</sup> The use of steering media subordinates the subjective ends of an action to the self-referential goals of functionally integrated systems; as a result, social activity in late capitalism takes on the “reifying character of objectified social processes” (CA 258).

Habermas’s analysis of the de-worlding effects of systemic media allow him to provide a general account of abstract domination in late capitalism—an account gathered together by the notion of the internal colonization of the lifeworld. Habermas dubs colonization those effects that arise “through the monetary redefinition of goals, relations and services, life-spaces and life-times, and through the bureaucratization of decisions, duties and rights, responsibilities and dependencies” (TCAII 322). The de-worlding effects of money are primarily felt in the “alienated labor” of workers, whose meaningful activity is quantified and monetarized, and the de-worlding effects of power felt in the “alienated mode of having a say in matters of public interest”, where individuals accept minimal political participation as a sufficient ground for legitimate state power (TCAII 350). In general, the lifeworld activities that fuel systems have to be “*abstracted, in a manner suitable to the medium in question*, into input factors for the corresponding subsystem, which can relate to its environment only via its own medium” (TCAII 322, emphasis in original). As a result, they transform the first-person meaningfulness of those activities into quantifiable mediums that are sucked into self-regulated vortices, turning such subjective ends into the objective means for the self-maintenance of systems.

At the core of Habermas’s description of internal colonization is this process of abstraction. Habermas argues that the inherent loss of meaning that this abstraction brings is compensated through mass consumption and welfare state clientalism. Thus, the inability to relate to our own activities as meaningfully ours is offset through material gains such “that the

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<sup>50</sup> See also TCAII 196.

structures of alienated labor and alienated political participation develop no explosive power” (TCAII 351). The need for this compensation is intensified as economic crises are increasingly shifted onto the administrative system and into the lifeworld. It is this pressure to materially compensate for the alienation brought about de-worlding system mediums that leads, Habermas argues, to the increasing saturation of lifeworld contexts by those same mediums. With the term internal colonization, Habermas is thinking of this saturation by systems mediums. This picture is not one of instrumental reason breaking out of the appropriate domains of the state and the economy. Thus, the appropriate political response cannot be an attempt to push back instrumental reason into properly circumscribed boundaries.

This can be further illustrated by the particular example Habermas gives of the internal colonization of the lifeworld: the phenomena of juridification [*Verrechtlichung*] under the welfare state.<sup>51</sup> Habermas argues that life under modern welfare states is characterized by an increasing density of legal regulations and provisions, especially for clients who depend on social provisions. While earlier institutionalizations of law in bourgeois society asserted the claims of lifeworld participants against the absolutist state, under the welfare state the “legal entitlements” to compensation for the reification of labor and political participation take the form

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<sup>51</sup> Habermas focus on juridification is far from accidental. In “Labor and Interaction”, Habermas reconstructs Hegel’s argument that “the domain of formal legal relations [is] the result of the decay of free morality...this free morality the young Hegel had seen as realized in the idealized constitution of the Greek *polis*. In 1802 he still asserts that, historically, private law first evolved in the form of Roman law, within a condition of the citizen’s depoliticization, of ‘decadence and universal degradation’: the intercourse of privatized individuals, subject to legal norms, compares unfavorably with the destroyed moral relation.” Habermas, “Labor and Interaction: On Hegel’s Jena *Philosophy of Mind*,” 166. Given that Habermas explicitly substitutes the lifeworld for the ethically integrated totality Hegel thought was exemplified by ancient Greece, we can see his description of juridification as likewise a description of the pathological *consequences* of the diremption wrought by de-worlding system mediums. Furthermore, here Hegel closely links the diremption of an ethical totality to a condition of *depoliticization*, where the decline of the ethical totality also destroys the basis of individuals’ ability to act as a citizen.

of “*restructuring interventions in the lifeworlds* of those who are so entitled” (TCAII 362, emphasis in original).<sup>52</sup> Since Habermas repeatedly emphasizes the connection between law and instrumental action, this would seem to be a prime example of lifeworld colonization by instrumental reason. Law leaves it to individuals to decide whether to take a communicative or instrumental attitude:<sup>53</sup> social actors in legally organized spheres always have the option of falling back on coercion if communicative action fails. In juridified domains, Habermas writes, individuals “[a]s legal subjects...encounter one another in an objectivizing, success-oriented attitude” (TCAII 369).

Importantly, for Habermas the spread of legal norms as a process of juridification is not *driven* by instrumental reason. On the contrary, juridification, and thus the increasing tendency of individuals to take an instrumental attitude towards each other and the state, is a pathological consequence of the de-worlding effects of money and power. As individuals’ self-and-other relations increasingly become defined in terms of these mediums, individuals have no choice but to fall back on their legal entitlements to sustain themselves. The bureaucratic regulation of entitlements cannot incorporate the “context of a life history and of a concrete form of life” into which it intervenes (TCAII 363). The use of instrumental reason and the recourse to legal entitlements can be thought of as a survival strategy for those whose daily experiences are saturated with abstract monetarized exchanges and clientelistic interaction with state bureaucracies. In Habermas’s vision, the disburdening effects of systemic mediums ricochet

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<sup>52</sup> To be clear, Habermas unambiguously endorses these provisions, but he thinks we need to focus on the hidden costs that come from the need to redeem welfare-state entitlements through bureaucratic and monetarized channels. These costs take the form of reification. His entire discussion of the welfare state—its tendency towards pathological individualization through bureaucratic technologies—echoes Foucault’s analysis of normalization. For an explicit reference to Foucault on this issue see *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, 79.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 28ff.

back to damage individuals' sense that their lives, their actions, and their relations are meaningfully their own. As a result, individuals must instrumentally look to legal entitlements to accomplish ends that could be achieved as part of "solidaric communities" (TCAII 362).

Perhaps most importantly, this inability to relate to one's activities as meaningfully one's own or to the intersubjective web of the lifeworld as generating meaningful demands for care leads to a condition of *depoliticization*. In Habermas's account, depoliticization focuses around the role of the citizen, which is transformed into the reified role of client when the meaningful basis of political activity is deformed. From the functionalist perspective of self-regulating systems, the lifeworld appears as a reservoir of power that can be quantified as votes and transferred into the administrative system. In exchange for votes, the administrative system provides individuals with financial benefits: they thus come to relate to the political system as *clients*, receiving benefits as a compensation for the abstraction away from political participation *as a citizen*. Depoliticization, then, is not only about *exclusion* from public spheres, but also the reductive transformation of political activity into a form that can be integrated by self-regulating systems.

This results in the "privatization" of the "hopes...for self-actualization and self-determination" that adhere to the idea of citizenship (TCAII 356). Because the abstraction of system-imperatives has rendered political participation practically ineffective, it becomes all but impossible for individuals to integrate their activities as citizens, which presupposes a sense of effective self-determination in politics, into their narrative self-conception. Political activity becomes instead a series of "ritualized confrontations" that compensate for this inability to understand oneself as a citizen in a self-determining political community (TCAII 351). And it is here, in the depoliticized public realm, that "new conflict potentials of late capitalist society are

gathering,” political potentials Habermas thinks are actualized in world-building social movements that demand the dereification of the lifeworld through meaningful voice in political institutions and the reintegration of economic exchange into the meaningful web of the lifeworld (TCAII 350).

So how does Habermas conceive of the political response to this situation of depoliticization? In the first place, it should be clear that the solution cannot reside in the creation of institutional sites of rational deliberation, as such an approach does not even consider the underlying phenomena of abstraction and reification Habermas describes as the internal colonization of the lifeworld. At the same time, because Habermas identifies the pathological dimensions of modern capitalism with specific de-worlding effects rather than the formalization of instrumental action in institutional domains, his theory of democracy does not oppose an anarchic lifeworld to regularized institutions. Habermas thus provides a way of thinking about radical democracy that captures the full depth of depoliticization in contemporary society while recognizing the importance of institutional power for overcoming the domination of systemic imperatives. The instrumentalization of politics *at the expense of the lifeworld* is a consequence of such de-worlding, but the solution, according to Habermas, does not entail an abandonment of instrumentalized power politics as such, only their resubordination to the lifeworld. Habermas’s use of systems theory to analyze depoliticization as a particular form of reification leaves him in a position to develop an analysis of the world-building aspect of radical democracy that does not view the legitimate exercise of state power as depoliticizing *per se*. Democratic self-determination demands that we rebuild the contexts—the sense of the meaningfulness of our relationships to others—that will allow us to dereify our own practices and in the process restore our sense of the reasons to act in the first place. While such world-building involves an

essentially extra-institutional component, its success is also dependent on its ability to harness the institutional structures that legitimate the exercise of power in order to turn that power towards the ends of dereifying social practices.

Although he does not explicitly name it as such, Habermas develops what I am calling the world-building dimension of radical democratic action in his analysis of the feminist and anti-growth social movements.<sup>54</sup> While these are grassroots political movements that often operate outside formal political institutions, Habermas thinks there is nothing to imply that they are structurally incompatible with institutional empowerment. In fact, if they take their focus to be the de-worlding effects of system mediums, then they need to direct energies towards transforming institutional structures where the effects of those mediums are most pervasive so that those structures are more responsive to the needs and demands of the lifeworld. Such engagement is not conceivable if systems are seen as domains of instrumental action, inherently incompatible with the communicative orientation of the lifeworld.

As extra-institutional sources of popular power, Habermas says that these movements begin at the Gramscian level of “cultural hegemony”, precisely the level that is neglected in

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<sup>54</sup> Habermas discusses what he calls the anti-growth movement in both *The Theory of Communicative Action* and his essay “The New Obscurity: The Crisis of the Welfare State and the Exhaustion of Utopian Energies,” while his most focused discussion of feminism is in *The Theory of Communicative Action* and *Between Facts and Norms*. With the idea of an anti-growth movement, Habermas acknowledges he is uniting heterogeneous political currents, from the “antinuclear and environmental movements” to the “psychoscene”, but he thinks that they all coalesce around “the critique of growth” (TCAII 393). See also Habermas’s discussion of civil disobedience as a “dissensus” that rejects the “life-form...which is tailored to the needs of a capitalist modernization process.” “Civil Disobedience: Litmus Test for the Democratic Constitutional State,” *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 30 (1985). For an examination of Habermas’s view of these movements that, while not focusing on de-worlding and world-building, still highlights their existential quality as contestation over forms of life, see Stephen K. White and Evan Robert Farr, “‘No-Saying’ in Habermas,” *Political Theory* 40, no. 1 (2012).

analyses that start from the institutionalization of rational deliberation.<sup>55</sup> These new forms of political contestation in the welfare state challenge reification: they are engaged in “defending and *restoring* ways of life...the new conflicts are not ignited by distribution problems but by questions to do with the grammar of forms of life” (TCAII 392, emphasis added). Only “the dissident critics of industrial society start from the premise that the lifeworld is equally threatened by commodification *and* bureaucratization.”<sup>56</sup> In challenging the domination of systemic imperatives they also seek to reverse “erosion” in the lifeworld (TCAII 392). They do this through a struggle “for definitions”, where the question is “the integrity and autonomy of life styles...[and] changes in the grammar of traditional forms of life.”<sup>57</sup> And this struggle is world-building insofar as these movements emphasize “[t]he revaluation of the particular, the natural, the provincial, of social spaces that are small enough to be familiar, of decentralized forms of commerce and despecialized activities, of segmented pubs, simple interactions, and dedifferentiated public spheres”, all of which, Habermas says, “is meant to foster the revitalization of possibilities for expression and communication that have been buried alive” (TCAII 395). World-building social movements, in short, are about protecting and rebuilding the fragile networks of relationships that make up forms of life, but this also brings them into radical-democratic *political* contestation about the general imperatives governing systemic rationality.

Importantly, Habermas does not seem to think we should try to draw out the universalist rationality of these movements at the expense of their particularist self-understandings. In other

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<sup>55</sup> Jürgen Habermas, "The New Obscurity: The Crisis of the Welfare State and the Exhaustion of Utopian Energies," in *The new Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians' Debate*, ed. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), 66.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 63, emphasis in original.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 67.

words, he does not seem concerned that these movements foster rational deliberation. Rather, his anxiety is that these movements will abandon an offensive stance and instead focus on the defensive rebuilding of the lifeworld (TCAII 393).<sup>58</sup> While these movements are sparked by the defensive need of individuals and groups to protect themselves from the harms of reification, Habermas hopes that the politicization such conflicts produce can be channeled into more transformative political activity. Thus, while in the first place these alternative cultural movements seek to rebuild the lifeworld contexts of meaningful action “within the microspheres of everyday communication”, he also thinks they can “consolidate into public discourses and higher-level forms of intersubjectivity” and eventually “autonomous public spheres.”<sup>59</sup> It is at this point that the world-building activity of these movements that “inherit the welfare state program in a radical-democratic” manner can also seek to render the “self-regulating mechanisms of the state...sufficiently sensitive to the goal-oriented results of radical democratic will-formation.”<sup>60</sup>

In all, Habermas’s political vision does not fit neatly into either a defensive or a radical-utopian politics; the enactment of utopian aspirations—the ideals of a non-reified form of life—

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<sup>58</sup> On this point I think Fraser’s concern that Habermas underestimates the importance of cultural separatism to feminism is valuable, but I also think that it is not clear Habermas intends a connection between the universalism he sees in feminism and its “emancipatory potentials” (TCAII 393). The particularist strain he identifies in feminism, for instance, is that it seeks to overturn “concrete forms of life marked by male monopolies”, hardly an objectionable goal (TCAII 395). This can also be seen, I think, by the hopes he expresses in “The New Obscurity” that the anti-growth movements, which he does not say uphold the universalist heritage of the Enlightenment, can nonetheless be “turned to the offensive” and seek to reorder of the relationship between the lifeworld and self-regulating systems. Ibid., 64. See Nancy Fraser, “What’s Critical About Critical Theory? The Case of Habermas and Gender,” in *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse, and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 134-37.

<sup>59</sup> Habermas, “The New Obscurity: The Crisis of the Welfare State and the Exhaustion of Utopian Energies,” 67.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

coincides with the defensive *rebuilding* of the worldly contexts of meaningful action. The strains of democratic theory that find democratic self-determination in moments of exceptional politics can be seen as preserving the possibility of utopian politics by protecting such moments from institutional structures which, when used for overly concrete utopian ends, turn dystopic.

Habermas proposes a different way of relating the utopian ideals of democratic self-determination to the sustained work of radical democratic world-building. He writes that even in a lifeworld deformed by systems mediums there

is a glimmer of symmetrical relations marked by free, reciprocal recognition. But this idea must not be filled in as the totality of a reconciled form of life and projected into the future as a utopia...All we know of them is that if they could be realized at all, they would have to be produced through our own combined effort and be marked by solidarity...Of course, 'producing' does not mean manufacturing according to the model of realizing intended ends. Rather, it signifies a *type of emergence* that cannot be intended, an emergence out of a cooperative endeavor to moderate, abolish, or prevent the suffering of vulnerable creatures.<sup>61</sup>

World-building radical democratic politics, in Habermas's account, begins from this fact that we experience the suffering of others as something meaningful because of our condition of mutual vulnerability. In seeking to abolish suffering—even as they take on the highly mediated forms of reification and alienation in contemporary capitalism—we encounter others on whom our attempts depend. Out of these encounters we restore to our lifeworlds a sense of the meaningfulness of our own activities and our relations to others, a process that generates new

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<sup>61</sup> "The Unity of Reason in the Diversity of Its Voices," in *Postmetaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 145-56, emphasis added.

forms of solidarity that draw from the utopian ideals of an egalitarian lifeworld. Finally, in identifying the structural sources of these harms in the de-worlding effects of the state and the market, we channel the solidarity generated in collective efforts to abolish suffering into *political power*, and use that political power to transform the institutional structures and modes of domination that support such contemporary manifestations of suffering.

### Conclusion

Welfare institutions manifestly function to reproduce existing social hierarchies and relations of domination, yet, as Arendt's analysis of worldliness helped articulate, they are also not reducible to technical calculation, insofar as such institutions are always also objects of public judgment and action. Yet for all that her thought is fecund, Arendt does not say much either about what happens to domination mediated by welfare institutions, nor about how political struggles over such institutions can become struggles against domination. Using the causality of fate as my guiding concept, I have argued Habermas's critique of domination provides particularly powerful resources for analyzing those dynamics. For Habermas, the crucial theoretical problem is how to revive the transformative potential of a critique of domination without falling back into dogmatism—whether of linear, technological progress, of a social harmony of interests, or of the inherently non-ideological perspective of the proletariat. His analysis of the causality of fate as a dynamic that can propel critical self-reflection provides just such a model for theorizing political practice that can overcome pseud-naturalized hierarchical structures. He thereby seeks to re-open the constellation of political questions Weber was hoping to pre-empt—most centrally, whether domination is the pseudo-natural result of the material demands of the everyday, or if relations of domination are a manifestation of the causality of fate such that it can be subject to critical self-reflection and overcome.

Moreover, Habermas's complements this theoretical account with a sophisticated analysis of the political dynamics of late capitalist society. In particular, Habermas's thought provides a framework for analyzing the complex interplay between structural and abstract domination in contemporary societies. Yet his thought also harbors a cluster of assumptions that pull him away from pursuing such an analysis. His efforts to ground the theoretical legitimacy of his thought more securely than the model of critical self-reflection allows pushes him to a teleological account of the progressive rationalization of the lifeworld, one that presupposes a complete social transition from structural to abstract domination. These two problematic aspects of Habermas's thought reinforce each other: the rationalization of the lifeworld presupposes the decreasing social tolerance for concrete, agentic domination, even structural domination where such agency is mediated by the market, and so that power increasingly detaches from the lifeworld and becomes an anonymous, systemic media. However, Habermas also presents an account of the lifeworld, one focused on mutual dependence, which reinforces, rather than abandons, his notion of critical self-reflection. And this second view of the lifeworld opens up the possibility of analyzing welfare institutions as mediators that mark the intersection between structural and abstract domination—and thus open up the possibility for political action that challenges both forms of domination. In this respect, feminist social movements, to which I now turn, have proved exemplary in using welfare institutions to challenge patriarchy, although at the risk of becoming implicated in the reproduction of abstract domination.

## **Chapter 6. The Population Question: Contradictions of Emancipation in the Twentieth-Century Welfare State**

If the twin “social question” and “workers’ question” defined Western European welfare politics in the nineteenth century, in the first half of the twentieth century they were eclipsed by the “population question”: what, if anything, should be done about Europe’s precipitously declining birth rates? Before World War I, many welcomed the decline, advancing the neo-Malthusian view that, with finite resources, slower population growth would increase individuals’ standard of living. Radical neo-Malthusians called for the legalization of birth control and abortion as well as national sex education programs. Pro-natalist views were primarily restricted to conservative and agrarian circles, which filtered the fact of declining birth rates through broader anxieties about cultural decay and the relative moral superiority of large, rooted agrarian families over small urban families. World War I produced a shift in these discourse. Research challenged the theoretical foundations of the neo-Malthusian view by pointing to the underutilization of existing resources and the economic burdens of an aging population. Moreover, the question of population was now inextricably bound up with that of war and inter-state competition. Declining populations marked a potentially existential threat, as many European intellectuals worried about the relative growth of less civilized races, especially the Slavic menace from the east. In response, political parties and intellectuals began debating a range of potential policy responses, and ideas that originated in far-right circles, such as taxes on bachelors and childless families and tax rebates or direct payments for large families, entered mainstream political discourse. While divergent in how the family should be managed, all these debates took it as a potential object of deliberate state action and intervention, an object that was inherently bound up with broader instrumental imperatives born of both economic and military pressures.

Sweden, today widely admired as a leader for gender equality, was also, for a time, a leader in advancing and implementing pro-natalist ideology and policy, albeit with a generally progressive slant. And this relative progressivism obtained because in Sweden, more than elsewhere, pro-natalist discourse intersected in with existing social-democratic networks and fields of mobilization. Indeed, just as the social question presented both a threat and an opportunity to those seeking the self-organization and mobilization of the working class, the population question provided an ambiguous opening for feminist demands for family policy interventions that would deliberately seek to overturn male domination in the household. What should we make of this mixture of unconditional, emancipatory demands for equality with instrumentalizing discourses that subordinated interventions in the family to the imperatives of the national community? In many respects, Sweden's story exemplifies the limitations of social feminism, which frames claims to emancipation in terms of the women question—what is women for?—and so “keeps women's radical demand for freedom...bound to an economy of use.”<sup>1</sup> By advancing equality under the guise of social improvement, Swedish feminists implicated themselves in the rationality of the existing state such that they reinforced the presentation of social problems as objects of hierarchical administrative management. Moreover, feminist claims became entangled with the construction of the Swedish national community—a fact with manifest repercussions in the contemporary mobilization of the ideal of gender equality to neutralize critiques of the racial dimensions of the Swedish welfare state and the reproduction of hegemonic culture vis-à-vis immigration communities in Sweden.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Zerilli, *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom*, 8-9.

<sup>2</sup> For current debates about these issues, see the essays in Kari Melby, Anna-Birte Ravn, and Christina Carlsson Wetterberg, eds., *Gender Equality and Welfare Politics in Scandinavia: The Limits of Political Ambition* (Bristol: The Policy Press, 2009).

Without denying that a critique of social feminism captures central aspects of the development of family policy in Sweden, I here want to pursue a different account of how to construe the relationship between instrumentality and emancipation in the formation of the family-friendly welfare state, one that builds on both Arendt's analysis of the worldly mediations of the economic and Habermas's account of the causality of fate and the dialectic of moral life. This approach shares radical-democratic concerns about the instrumentalization of emancipatory claims by functional demands of the reproduction of the economic structures and the nation-state. Yet it also draws attention to the converse phenomenon: how the pursuit of those same instrumental imperatives produces lasting objects that occasion collective, political judgments and forms of self-objectification that can inaugurate a dialectic of moral life. Indeed, here I want to draw together those two threads as part of a single process of interwoven functionalization and politicization—the causality of fate. The causality of capitalist reproduction and inter-state military competition brought forth the family as an object of instrumental manipulation and control. Yet such causality always operates through agents with a capacity for self-reflection, and thus it is a causality of fate rather than nature. Indeed, the very functionalization of the family as a potential object of technical control helped to generate the critical awareness into the mutability of gender relations that is the necessary precondition for the emancipatory claim to freedom and equality. Even if, of course, they did not use such Hegelian terms themselves, the logic of the claims of emancipatory political movements reframed family relationships as forms of collective self-objectification that could be overcome through ongoing practices of critical reflection. And such critical practice occurred, not with reference to a universal claim to validity that sought to overcome the vagaries of political action, but through open-ended modes of political mobilization and self-reflection—an open-endedness manifest in the still ongoing aspiration to

gender equality in Sweden. In my reconstruction, social feminism is a powerful critical category precisely because it draws attention to the implication of all political action with the functional demands of modern capitalist nation-states. Yet, in identifying emancipatory political action *only* with non-instrumental praxis, that critical framework fails to identify the emancipatory potential of poesis—of constructing lasting, institutional objects that are at once bound up with the instrumental imperatives of capitalist accumulation but that represent the traces of democratic agency—and so which can become the objects of future critical self-reflection.

### Gender, Domination, and Objectification

The following, then, pursues the claim that Habermas's critical theory of domination can provide resources for analyzing the politics of the family and gender equality in the welfare state. In the previous chapter, I examined Habermas's account of the causality of fate and the dialectic of morality as models for thinking about the reproduction of systems of domination in contemporary societies. His original exploration of those notions was part of a more general effort to revive certain aspects of the Marxist critique of capitalism, and, as a result, his analysis of systematically distorted communication took as its model class conflict. Indeed, his social-theoretic thesis about the transition from structural to abstract forms of domination depends on questionable empirical assumptions about the pacification of class conflict in the welfare state. Here, I want to pursue a related issue: how can we transfer the model of the causality of fate and the dialectic of morality to other forms of domination, such as gender domination? I turn to Judith Butler's analysis of gender domination for an account of gender domination that, with structural affinities to Habermas's view, shows how his notion of systematically distorted communication could be transferred to forms of domination other than class. Without denying important differences between their views—differences which have been unduly exaggerated in

the polemics surrounding Butler's work—I seek to explicate their shared theoretical perspective, a perspective grounded in the effort to deploy Freud to understand the internalization of structures of domination.<sup>3</sup> Thus, Butler provides a crucial account of gender domination as a form of systematically distorted communication.

In particular, Butler's account of the melancholic structure of compulsory heterosexuality expands Habermas's notion of systematically distorted communication into the domain of gender domination. Theoretically, Butler's analysis has two distinct advantages to Habermas's. First, as Allen argues, Butler accounts for how systematic distortions of communication constitute certain forms of subjectivity and, indeed, subjects as subjects. That is, she provides a more thorough account than does Habermas of the interaction between domination and subjectivization. Second, and more centrally for my purposes, Butler's view unravels the overly tight linkage Habermas draws between domination and the material reproduction of society. That is, we cannot assume, as Habermas does, that the decreasing salience of class conflict through the technical rationalization of production and state interventions automatically renders lifeworlds transparent enough that gender domination no longer reproduces itself through ideology—even if changes in the material organization may expand the vulnerability of gender hierarchies to communication challenge. Butler's analysis shows that arbitrary social norms, such as gender norms, have the linguistic resources to naturalize themselves and shield themselves from critique even as economic conflicts may become more transparent.

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<sup>3</sup> Amy Allen has also pointed to some of the potential commonalities between Habermas and Butler's views, insofar as Habermas's theory of moral development assumes processes of socialization shot through with power relationships. Amy Allen, *The Politics of Ourselves: Power, Autonomy, and Gender in Contemporary Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 72-95.

Nonetheless, I also argue that, in crucial respects, Butler's account of the internalization of domination does not fully account for the dynamics through which subjects come to recognize as arbitrary and historically mutable the structures that partially constitute them as agents. Butler provides an unsatisfactory account of this process because she tends to move back and forth between a more historically specific theory of the relationship between melancholic subjectivity and structures of domination to a general account of the constitution of subjects through melancholic incorporation in general. At the very least, her account leaves ambiguous how these two levels of analysis relate to each other, such that it provides few resources for thinking through the specific political dynamics through which melancholic forms of subjectification are politicized and partially overcome. And this is, in part, because she conceives of the social primarily in terms of instrumentality—as a domain of knowable objects constituted through melancholic introjection. Modeled as her account is on the direct relationship between the individual and the social totality, Butler does not account for the worldly, material mediations of structures of domination. Once these mediations are brought into focus, we can draw together Butler's analysis of the movement from melancholy to mourning with Habermas's theory of the dialectic of morality to capture how individuals come to recognize and contest the structures that make them intelligible as particular subjects in an existing social order.

At the center of Butler's critical analysis of gender domination is her claim that genders exist only through their ritual performance, a performance that retroactively posits the existence of a substance that is expressed through that performance.<sup>4</sup> Gender exists as an effect of its performance, and the paradox of gender, understood performatively, is precisely that it retroactively creates the very forms of subjectivity that are then taken as constitutive of our

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<sup>4</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 14.

actions as gendered agents. The lasting impact of Butler's analysis arises from how it accounts for *both* the artificial, social constitution of gender through ritualized norms and for the seeming intractability of those norms, their resilience with regards to critical insight into their artificiality. Indeed, Butler asserts that the intractability of gender domination is, in part, built into the grammar of language, insofar as ordinary language operates based on the assumption of an intentional subject who acts behind or before its deeds. The paradox of the subjectivity constituted through ritualized performances is that any narration of "how the subject is constituted" through domination and power "presupposes that the constitution has already taken place," as it is the subject who is giving an account of itself.<sup>5</sup> Domination does not just operate upon pre-given subjects but constitutes subjects as intelligible objects of control—a fact which means any act of resistance in the name of abject or subordinate identities will be implicated in the structures of domination it opposes.

Butler's analysis of the relationship between gender, power, and subjectivity crucially illuminates the mechanisms by which domination, in Habermas's terms, renders itself invisible and operates through the causality of symbols split off from dialogic relations of communication. Structures of domination constitute subjects precisely by obscuring the causality of their power, by presenting as already given what is in fact the result of domination. This comparison, however, may seem implausible, insofar as it may be taken to imply a pre-existing, non-distorted dialogical relationship of precisely the sort Butler rejects as a fiction. And indeed, one line of criticism of Butler is that, lacking such an ideal of non-dominating mutual recognition, she fails to distinguish between the reproduction of gender and resistance—in Amy Allen's words, "to

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<sup>5</sup> *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 11, hereafter cited as "PLP".

differentiate critical and subversive reinscriptions of subordinating norms from faithful ones.”<sup>6</sup>

To be sure, an important part of resistance, for Butler, is the possibility for subversive repetition, a vulnerability of all performative structures insofar as utterances “will be subject to infelicity, to speaking otherwise” (PLP 82). This is Butler’s Foucaultian conception of resistance, where all acts of resistance are nonetheless internal to the structures of power they oppose and only operate by re-working the interstices or potential gaps of those structures.<sup>7</sup> For Allen, this view of resistance insufficiently distinguishes subordination from non-dominating dependency and vulnerability. Yet I also think that, in crucial moments in Butler’s account of our perverse attachment to the very identities and structures that subjugate us, she opens up a different analysis of critical challenge to compulsory heterosexuality and gender subordination. In this understanding, transformative political challenges to domination occur through the public avowal of suppressed grief rather than just the infelicitous repetition of dominant social norms. And this analysis has striking affinities to Habermas’s notion of critical self-reflection, especially if we reconstruct Habermas’s notion without grounding it on any linear or teleological unfolding of the immanent structure of undistorted communication—that is, without assuming that critical political practice involves holding up the ideal of non-distorted, interpersonal recognition as a positive critical standard with which to judge relationships of domination.

These alternate moments come out in Butler’s account of the melancholic structure of compulsory heterosexuality. While Butler begins developing her analysis of this structure in *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter*, by *The Psychic Life of Power* she more fully acknowledges the ways that it troubles her understanding of gender as performativity—and so

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<sup>6</sup> Allen, *The Politics of Ourselves: Power, Autonomy, and Gender in Contemporary Critical Theory*, 74.

<sup>7</sup> For a helpful critique of this aspect of Butler’s thought, see Zerilli, *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom*, 50-58.

opens up a conception of critical self-reflection that goes beyond subversive reinscription. Butler introduces her account of the melancholic nature of gender norms through a self-critique of her view of performativity. The limitation of the performativity perspective, she contends, is its failure to acknowledge that “what is exteriorized or performed can only be understood by reference to what is barred from performance, what cannot or will not be performed” (PLP 144-145). And this unsaid arises, for Butler, through the constitution of various form of subjectivity in melancholic self-foreclosure. Butler’s notion of melancholic subject illuminates the functioning of social prohibitions on avowing certain needs and losses—how systematic distortions of language operates, not just through restricting what can be said, but through constituting subjects around such prohibitions and foreclosures. In Butler’s reconstruction, mourning is opposed to melancholy insofar as mourning openly acknowledges the lost object, while melancholy, because it cannot acknowledge the loss, incorporates the object into the self, turning the self into an object of simultaneously love and hatred. “If the object can no longer exist in the external world,” Butler writes, “it will then exist internally, and that internalization will be a way to disavow the loss, to keep it at bay, to stay or postpone the recognition and suffering of loss” (PLP 134).

In her admittedly hyperbolic description of heterosexual melancholy, that constitutive loss is a loss of the possibility of homosexual love and attachment. Heterosexual subjects are constituted by a loss of a potential object of love, a loss that the melancholic subject “refuses to acknowledge” (PLP 182). Our ambivalent relationship to that original object—at once attraction and hatred because the object rejects us—then becomes an ambivalent relationship to ourselves. In melancholy, the subject substitutes their own ego for the lost object, trying to keep alive their relationship with the other. Yet the ego can never be a perfect substitute and so cannot fully

compensate for the loss. Instead, we are kept in our state of loss, only now we blame ourselves, taking out our anger towards the lost object on our own ego. For Butler, this melancholic structure of heterosexuality helps account for the “hyperbolic identifications by which mundane heterosexual masculinity and femininity confirm themselves” (PLP 147). The melancholy aspect of gender identity expresses itself in the rage and violence against deviance through which gender norms are sustained. Yet, for Butler, these forms of rage are actually a reflection of “the internal violence of conscience,” as heterosexual subjectivity is sustained by “marshaling aggression in the service of refusing to acknowledge a loss that has already taken place” (PLP 183).

Butler’s account of the relationship between melancholy and gender is an effort to understand the attachment of subjects to their own subjection. Relationships of domination, in this view, are sustained in part through the foreclosure of publically avowing and mourning the losses that constitute those particular identities. While Butler focuses on compulsory heterosexuality, that is only one instance of a broader logic of the social constitution of identities in the context of domination. Indeed, Butler’s deployment of the distinction between melancholy and mourning to analyze specific structures of domination complements and further fleshes out Habermas’s notion of systematically distorted communication. Melancholy reflects “an unspeakability that organizes the field of the speakable,” and that unspeakability inscribes “prevailing norms of social recognition” and “forms of social power” (PLP 186, 171, 183). The individual subject is formed through the prohibitions of prevailing society, yet that subject becomes melancholic insofar as it cannot even recognize those prohibitions as prohibitions and so express the needs that may be left unfulfilled—the situation Habermas describes as a systematic distortion of the possibility of communication.

The melancholic subject, further, is engaged in “a compensatory form of negative narcissism” and so are incapable of engaging in fully reflexive intersubjective communication that presupposes the possibility of critical challenging prevailing norms (PLP 182). Rather, the melancholic subject monologically judges itself by reference to those social norms—norms the subject has incorporated as part of their own ego. And so even as the melancholic speaks, it “refuses to speak to or of the other,” fixating instead on its own failure to be deserving of social recognition, a self-loathing which is fueled by unacknowledged hatred of the lost other, as the ego has become a partial substitute for the lost object (PLP 182-183). In this respect, the melancholic individual resembles the sort of self Habermas thinks is upheld by the tradition of the “philosophy of the subject” and that is ruthlessly dissected in Horkheimer and Adorno’s *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*: the subject who thinks that morality requires the mastery of internal and external nature, that seeks to dominate itself and others in the name of absolute injunctions.

Melancholy, then, arises from social prevailing foreclosures on avowing certain suppressed needs and, moreover, the loss of the possibility of even acknowledging that loss as a loss (what Butler calls a “double disavowal” (PLP 139-149)). Mourning, in contrast, operates precisely by making intersubjective, by translating individual suffering into a common language. The melancholic constitution of the subject reflects “a rebellion that has been put down, crushed,” and part of the effects of the foreclosures and internalizations of the lost object is to “preempt an insurrectionary rage” (PLP 153). As a result, even the melancholic subject contains “anger that can be translated into political expression,” anger which can be “given a dramatic language” through, for instance, public acts of mourning losses that go against the dominant norms of acceptable love and attachment (PLP 147, 150). “In mourning...there is nothing about the loss that is unconscious,” Butler writes (PLP 183). In other words, mourning holds out, if

only negatively and through loss, the possibility of forming communities based on the open avowal of needs—precisely what Habermas understands by unconstrained intersubjectivity. Thus, as Adam Phillips notes, mourning holds a privileged place in psychoanalytic discourse “because it convinces us of something we might otherwise doubt; our attachment to others” (PLP 153). In sum, melancholia produces a solipsistic subject, turned back upon itself, unable to thematize and question social norms, while mourning attests to our attachment and vulnerability to others and so to the possibility of achieving mutual recognition through challenges to arbitrary structures of domination. Mourning, like melancholy, will take on a specific content with reference to the foreclosures sustaining particular orders of domination. On a formal level, however, mourning stands for the process through which suppressed needs—indeed, foreclosed desires and relationships that can not even be acknowledged as losses—become objects of common, political concern. Butler’s primary example is the public mourning during the AIDS epidemic, which made public the possibility of homosexual attachment. Similarly, Linda Zerilli’s points to the Milan Collective’s use of the “symbolic mother” as an organizing figure for feminist politics as an example of the importance of making public the forms of attachment and love which are foreclosed by patriarchal social norms—in this case, “the relationship between mothers and daughters.”<sup>8</sup>

Butler’s analysis of the melancholic structure of domination, then, provides a picture of how systematic distortions on communication function through the constitution of subjects and not just restrictions on thematizable speech. And, more so than Habermas, she is alert to the persistence of structures of domination even in ostensibly modernized societies—that contemporary lifeworlds certainly still certainly have the resources to disguise and distort

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 113.

relationships of power. However, Butler does not fully pursue this line of reflection into the historical and political conditions of avowing suppressed needs, instead focusing more on providing a trans-historical philosophical account of the constitution of subjects through an original melancholic incorporation.<sup>9</sup> Habermas, perhaps more than Butler, resists this decontextualization of the original loss that constitutes the ego and so leaving opening the possibility of translating a melancholic object into an object of public avowal. And Butler, I contend, is drawn into this de-contextualized account because of a view of language that presents ordinary speech as part of an instrumental system, one in which each object is calculable and knowable. Put differently, Butler's analysis of the melancholic constitution of the ego repeats, albeit in a highly sophisticated form, the critique of the instrumentality of the everyday.

So, while she earlier analysis melancholy as arising from the foreclosure of mourning historically specific lost objects, such as homosexual love, Butler then moves to examine melancholy as the founding turn by which the subject is formed as distinct from systems of social signification. And this occurs through a founding melancholic incorporation: "melancholia initiates a variable boundary between the psychic and the social, a boundary...that distributes and regulates the psychic sphere in relation to the prevailing norms of social regulation" (PLP 171). The self is constituted through a turning back from the lost object and its substitution with the ego; the subject is inherently a melancholic subject. Melancholy marks the constitutive loss that forms the self. We become subjects by substituting ourselves for the lost object—an object we both love and hate—and then berating ourselves in the way we would want to berate that object. And this initial foreclosure also produces the set of terms in which we can understand

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<sup>9</sup> For similar concerns about how Butler integrates these levels of analysis, see David W. McIvor, "Bringing Ourselves to Grief: Judith Butler and the Politics of Mourning," *Political Theory* 40, no. 4 (2012).

ourselves in an existing symbolic system. To be a self, then, is to have certain forms of attachment bared. We can only come to know ourselves through an original melancholic incorporation, such that our sense of self is always constituted through terms that are “never fully one’s own”—indeed, through terms that are always incomplete and not fully representable, since they must constitutively foreclose the public avowal of certain potential attachments (PLP 197).

Butler thus advances a second, more deconstructive notion of melancholy, according to which the subject is always produced through constitutive foreclosures and loss. As a result, for her, mourning always presupposes melancholy: “melancholia, defined as the ambivalent reaction to loss, may be coextensive with loss, so that mourning is subsumed in melancholia” (PLP 174). The terms in which we mourn a loss—make it public and avow it—will always be partially constituted through melancholy. As Butler writes, “there is no final reprieve from ambivalence and no final separation of mourning from melancholia” (PLP 193). Butler advances the more emphatic version of this argument by noting the role that substitute objects play in both mourning and melancholy. In mourning, one may lose both a loved one or an ideal which has come to stand for that loved one—an abstract object—which would seem to fit more with Freud’s discussion of melancholy as a more ideal loss. Yet, as Butler notes but does not develop, melancholy is still different in that one is unable to represent what about the loss of the object constitutes its loss. This fits with the image of melancholy on the prohibition, not just on mourning the loss, but on acknowledging the loss as a loss. If one cannot identify what in the attachment constitutes its loss as a loss, then it is impossible to publically work through the loss as a loss.

In other words, the ambiguous relationship between mourning and melancholy—the difficulty, in any particular instance, of finally separating them out—is a vital corrective to any

self-congratulatory complacency about a society overcoming domination. Yet it does not itself warrant the idea of a constitutive melancholic subject. Indeed, one could just as well conclude from that ambiguity that melancholy can always become mourning—that, given certain conditions, one can always find the words to identify the formerly unspeakable loss. And this is Habermas's interpretation of the work of melancholy. The formation of the super-ego through the “establishment of abandoned loss objects in the ego” operates via a “sanctification of certain propositions.”<sup>10</sup> The commands of the super-ego, as the product of the unmournable loss, function as “libidinally-bound basic propositions...immunized against critical objection.”<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, they “are not excluded from public communication as such” but “remain within a common, unmutilated language.”<sup>12</sup> And the work of critical reflection is then to make explicit those losses and so de-sanctify the internalized social commands operative in the super-ego. Furthermore, as we saw in the previous chapter, critical reflection and a dialectic of morality that exposes the suppressed and foreclosed losses that form particular subjects at a particular historical moment is always a contingent and open-ended process. In other words, there will be no theoretically authoritative language that could definitely distinguish mourning from melancholy. Rather, the question will be whether sanctified propositions can be rendered linguistically fluid and subject to critical reflection—the success of which can only be determined retroactively and through practice. In other words, the distinction between mourning and melancholy is always a practical one that cannot be theoretically determined in advance—and, at times and in different ways, both Habermas and Butler are tempted into attempting to theoretically settle such questions.

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<sup>10</sup> Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 244.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

On a more fundamental level, Butler sometimes does not pursue this line of thought because of how she understands the constitution of the social through melancholic incorporation, especially in relationship to linguistic systems. For Butler, one of the functions of melancholic incorporation is to “produce certain kinds of objects and to bar others from the field of social production” (PLP 25). Butler’s view seems to be that the set of social objects conceivable at a certain historical moment is set by the inaugural foreclosures that constitute the subject as an entity distinct from systems of social signification. Domination functions, then, by determining what objects are knowable and representable—such structures reproduce themselves through the foreclosures that constitute both individual subjects and the terms of public intelligibility. Butler’s argument, in other words, rests on a highly sophisticated iteration of the idea that established institutions are structures of domination because they render the world into knowable and technically controllable objects.

The intelligibility of our social identities rests on the production of a domain of fixed and knowable objects through melancholic incorporation. In Habermas’s account, in contrast, melancholic incorporation and, by extension, domination, works, not through the formation of an outside that constitutes a symbolic system, but pragmatically, by immobilizing and fixing certain intersubjective practices. And this means that Habermas’s view implicitly resists the reduction of the everyday to instrumentality and technical calculation, insofar as he views everyday practices as constituted through the interplay between open-ended dialogical interactions and structures that may become immunized from critical challenge through melancholic incorporation. In other words, while for Butler mourning always presupposes melancholy and so the constitutive loss that founds systems of social signification, for Habermas, melancholic incorporation functions within a domain of open-ended pragmatic practices that cannot be predetermined from within a

system of signification. And this is why, for him, melancholy is a matter of the sanctification of propositions—elements of intersubjective practices—rather than the constitution of objects.

Finally, and again as a consequence of this implicit reduction of the everyday to instrumentality, Butler is unable to account for the material mediation of domination through the social world. For Butler, the materiality of domination resides in the ritual nature of the performativity that retroactively posits a subject, an iterative structure that renders “belief and practice inseparable” (PLP 120). Yet ritual alone does not account for the material mediations of domination. In particular, it fails to account for how the mediation of domination—the dependence of structures domination on the constitution of durable material objects—also constitutes shared worlds that can become the sites of collective judgment and action. Indeed, since Butler sees the subject as only constituted through a folding-back upon themselves of social structures, her view tends to occlude, or at least presuppose the historical disappearance of, the material, worldly mediations between individuals and the social totality that give them a particular worldly location. Iris Marion Young captures these mediations well with her account of the practico-inert dimensions of gender domination and the social world more generally. Young argues that gendered subjects are not just constituted through ritual practices whose performance retroactively posits a subject and which rest on constitutive foreclosures, but also through the accretion of past historical practices and actions in the current world of material objects. Gender exists as a category only in “a structural relation to material objects as they have been produced and organized by a prior history.”<sup>13</sup> Thus, the concept of gender, like race and class, “do not primarily name attributes of individuals or aspects of their identity but practico-

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<sup>13</sup> Iris Marion Young, "Gender as Seriality: Thinking About Women as a Social Collective," *Signs* 19, no. 3 (1994): 728. Although she develops these arguments into a broader analysis of structural domination, I focus on Young's account of gender. See *Responsibility for Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

inert necessities that condition their lives and with which they must deal. Individuals may take up varying attitudes towards these structures, including forming a sense of class or racial identity and forming groups with others they identify with.”<sup>14</sup> Without a doubt, the ability of those groups to come to recognize the practical constitution and so historical mutability of those structures may be impeded by the incorporation of social structures into the constitution of subjects. Yet that process of incorporation should not be so inflated as to erase the uneven and open material worlds in which most live out their lives—worlds that are structured by past relations of domination without being determined by them.

Butler’s account of the melancholic structure of compulsory heterosexuality expands Habermas’s notion of systematically distorted communication into the domain of gender domination. And, in particular, Butler’s analysis points to the ongoing reproduction of structures of domination in contemporary societies. The evolution of Sweden’s family policies reflect this point, as gender norms have proven surprisingly resilient even as changes in the material organization of society have rendered family structures more fluid and open to critical challenge. Nonetheless, Butler’s framework does not fully capture this interplay between material reorganizations and gender domination, as she never systematically develops her call for public avowal and mourning into a political framework that seeks to grasp the interplay between objective social forces and political challenges to domination. For this purpose, Habermas’s development of the causality of fate and the dialectic of morality provides a crucial political complement to her view.

#### Beyond Habermas? Fraser and Politics of Need Interpretation

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<sup>14</sup> “Gender as Seriality: Thinking About Women as a Social Collective,” 732.

Butler, then, provides a valuable model for transferring aspects of Habermas's account of systematically distorted communication to gender domination. Yet her analysis of the relationship between melancholy and mourning leads her to reduce the social world to authoritatively fixed social definitions, such that her account fails to allow for the material, institutional mediation of—and so possibility for political challenge to—structures of domination. Here, I turn to Nancy Fraser's seminal effort to construct a critical theory adequate to contemporary feminist struggles so as to consider further what the model of the causality of fate could contribute to thinking about political struggles against domination in the welfare state. In particular, while Butler crucially expands the analysis of structural domination to include practices gender domination, Fraser's critical engagement with Habermas brings into focus the importance of abstract domination—and the complex interactions of the structural and abstract mediations of domination—for developing a feminist critique of the welfare state. At the same time, I contend that, while Fraser provides vital theoretical resources for thinking through struggles against domination in the welfare state, her efforts are also marked by inherited, Weberian socio-theoretic categories: most centrally, an instrumentalist and calculative view of political institutions.

Fraser develops her own view of political struggles in the welfare state in large part through a critical dialogue with Habermas's mature thought. On the one hand, Fraser is sympathetic to Habermas's effort to integrate first person, interpretive accounts of social life with objectivating perspectives that can point to the structural factors influencing subjective self-understanding.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, one of the abiding features of Fraser's thought has been an effort to situate within one framework both subjective and objective perspectives on the social world and,

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<sup>15</sup> Fraser, "What's Critical About Critical Theory? The Case of Habermas and Gender," 139, hereafter cited as "HG".

relatedly, both cultural and material understandings of injustice and political agency (i.e., recognition and redistribution). Thus, Fraser finds Habermas's "dualistic" theoretical approach fecund. On the other hand, subjecting to his work to feminist analysis, Fraser faults Habermas for transforming this methodological dualism into a substantive divide between distinct social spheres, a move that, in her view, leads Habermas to shield the gendered hierarchy of modern societies from critical scrutiny. In other words, Fraser seeks to distinguish the critical Habermas from the ideological Habermas (HG 114). The ideological Habermas maps the functional demands for symbolic and material reproduction onto concrete social activities (primarily the family and the economic sphere, respectively), while the critical Habermas construes that distinction as a "pragmatic-contextual" heuristic (HG 115); the ideological Habermas completely separates social integration from systemic integration, while the critical Habermas sees both modes interwoven in all institutions; and finally, the ideological Habermas positions the family as a consensual domain of social integration and symbolic reproduction, while the critical Habermas provides tools to perceive the functional and material imperatives hidden behind the communicative façade of family life.

So, at the center of Fraser's critique is a concern that Habermas transforms a useful methodological dualism into a substantive divide. By mapping communicative action and social integration onto particular institutions like the family and separating them from the instrumental spheres focused on material reproduction, such as the market, he neglects forms of power—such as gender domination—that run across both spheres (HG 119). Fraser's critique is powerful and inspires much of my previous criticism of Habermas. Yet it also risks conflating several levels of Habermas's argument, such that she misses some of the critical force of his efforts. In particular, Fraser accepts the reading that Habermas's term "system" designates domains of "self-interested,

utility-maximizing calculations” deploying the media of money and power (HG 117). This has two mutually reinforcing consequences: first, it leads Fraser to too quickly map Habermas’s distinction between system and lifeworld onto concrete institutional domains; and second, it compels her to miss the distinctive nature of Habermas’s conception of power *as a steering medium* and so to conflate power in this specific sense with domination more generally.

Thus, Fraser critiques Habermas for having a “dualistic” model of the institutional structure of contemporary capitalist society (HG 119). However, Habermas is at pains to emphasize that his “dualistic” schematizations are only “*from the standpoint of the subsystems*” (TCAII 319, emphasis in original). Systems theory compels the heuristic fiction that there is such a thing as a self-contained economic domain, but that description is only picking up the real abstractions produced by the continuous use of power and money throughout all social domains. That is, systems theory compels a description of an economic “system” even though the system runs through all social domains insofar as they use money: similarly, the political system is interwoven with the lifeworld via the media of money. Once we detach the use of these media with *intentional* action orientations and see, as I argued previously, that they have an elective affinity with such orientations, then we can analyze the *ambiguous* structuring effects the increasing use of such media have on lifeworld domains such as the family.<sup>16</sup> By this, I mean the manifold ways in which the development of systems media both re-distributes certain functional imperatives—thereby, for instance, increasing the capacity for exit—even as it provides new

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<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Fraser’s concerns about Habermas’s internal colonization thesis could be alleviated by his distinction between the mediatization of the lifeworld and its colonization (HG 119-120, 130; TCAII 183-184). The notion of mediatization points to how steering media, even as they pose a threat to the lifeworld, can also produce pressures on hierarchical lifeworld relationships, such as gender hierarchies, such that they have to be converted from frozen normative scripts to dynamic communicatively secured relationships—precisely the aspect of the lifeworlds interaction with system that Frasers contends Habermas underplays.

bases for male domination, as evident in the patriarchal structure of many forms of social protection (I provide more historical substance for these tentative reflections in the third section). In sum, Habermas does not claim that the family as a concrete institution—as opposed to an aspect of the lifeworld from the perspective of the system—has “only an extrinsic and incidental relation to money and power” (HG 119), as both media will have a dynamic, structuring effect on any practice in which they are used.

As a result of conflating systems analysis with functional analysis and instrumental orientations, Fraser also runs together Habermas notion of power as a steering media with power understood more generally. In this regard, Fraser contends that it is “a grave mistake to restrict the use of the term ‘power’ to bureaucratic contexts. Habermas would do better to distinguish different kinds of power, for example, domestic-patriarchal power, on the one hand, and bureaucratic-patriarchal power, on the other—not to mention various other kinds and combinations in between” (HG 121). Habermas admits that his own terminology on this point has been confusing, but he nonetheless rightly insists that he has never suggested we should only analyze power in terms of a steering media.<sup>17</sup> His goal is not to restrict the usage of the term but to develop an account of the specifically modern rationalization of power into an abstract media that can communicate with and compensate for the malfunctioning of the money-media system (i.e., the “economy”). Indeed, one of Habermas’s great socio-theoretic advances is to insist that political activities can take on the same sort of objectivizing, second-nature dynamics that lead to an objective inversion of means and ends as Marx’s commodity fetish, and that such objectivizing tendencies are complexly interwoven with the displacement of and compensation

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<sup>17</sup> Habermas, "A Reply" 254.

for social conflicts and pathologies arising from the economic system.<sup>18</sup> Fraser's objection takes its departure from an intuitive, lifeworld conception of power, which focuses on direct, interpersonal relationships—between husband and wife, bureaucrat and client. Without a doubt, Habermas views that as a vitally important mode of analysis. Yet it will also be incomplete if it does not consider the structuring effects of rise of a bureaucratic-political system integrated through power as an abstracting steering media—a set of systemic imperatives that have only a contingent relationship to gender hierarchy.<sup>19</sup>

Nonetheless, Fraser is surely right that Habermas fails to fully integrate gender domination into his account of the social pathologies of contemporary capitalism, foregrounding reification at the expense of “dominance and subordination” (HG 138). As Fraser notes, gender hierarchies currently mark all the “interchange” relationships between system and lifeworld: worker and citizen are both coded as male, while consumer and client are both gendered as female (HG 123-125). And Habermas’s neglect of gender hierarchies further screens out the material labor of childrearing—a form of necessary social labor that has not been transferred over to either subsystem but that is maintained through hierarchical relations in the family (HG 125).<sup>20</sup> So why, aside from the briefest mention of feminist social movements as attempting to

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<sup>18</sup> Which, in turn, give rise to new disturbances in the economic system, such as through public debt crises or the 2008 financial crisis. For analyses of the public debt crisis as a return of displaced economic conflicts that the political system could no longer process, see Wolfgang Streeck, *Buying Time: The Delayed Crisis of Democratic Capitalism*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London: Verson, 2014). Similarly, for an account of the 2008 financial crisis as a product of displaced economic conflicts via “privatized Keynesianism,” see Colin Crouch, “Privatised Keynesianism: An Unacknowledged Policy Regime,” *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations* 11, no. 3 (2009); Prasad, *The Land of Too Much: American Abundance and the Paradox of Poverty*.

<sup>19</sup> For this argument, see Andrew Sayer, “System, Lifeworld and Gender: Associational Versus Counterfactual Thinking,” *Sociology* 34, no. 4 (2000).

<sup>20</sup> Arguably, the replacement of the family wage structure by the dual-income household entailed the mediatization, in Habermas’s sense, of childrearing. A portion of the material labor of

overturn “concrete forms of life marked by male monopolies” (TCAII 393), does Habermas not incorporate these feminist concerns more deeply into the architecture of his theory? In my view, rather than arising from an unacknowledged “natural-kinds” interpretation of the system-lifeworld distinction, Habermas can only awkwardly incorporate such concerns because it would challenge his view of the transition from structural to abstract domination and, relatedly, of the rationalization of the lifeworld. Gender domination represents a form of structural violence that relies on suppressed communication. But despite Habermas’s protestations that he never intended to present an “‘innocent image of ‘power-free spheres of communication,’” the logic of his account precisely discounts the possibility that, in contemporary societies, “social integration proceeds via norms of domination which sublimate violence” (CA 254). Habermas’s repeated insistence, surveyed in the previous chapter, that modern forms of life are too transparent to provide a structural niche for such covert restrictions on communication are defied by the persistence of gendered social norms and their pervasive institutional manifestations.<sup>21</sup> In sum, although some of Fraser’s theoretical criticisms of Habermas’s framework misconstrue key aspects of his thought, she is devastatingly on point about the absence of gender analysis in his thought. However, the source of Habermas’s neglect is not, as Fraser argues, an over-drawn distinction between system and lifeworld, but rather his assumption that structural domination can no longer find a foothold in a rationalized, modern lifeworld. Conversely, this means that

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childrearing has been transferred over to public or private childcare, and so the labor is now explicitly mediatized through either money or power. Nonetheless, abundant evidence attests to the *partial* effects of this mediatization on power-relations in the lifeworld: even in the most “advanced” countries on these issues, women still take on a disproportionate share of domestic responsibilities as well as of the unpaid “administration” of childcare. At the same time, however, this mediatization means that childcare is increasingly thematized as a social and political problem, thereby breaking down a normative consensus secured through systematic distortion on communication and exposing gender hierarchies to discursive challenge.

<sup>21</sup> For a further development of this point, see Allen, *The Politics of Ourselves: Power, Autonomy, and Gender in Contemporary Critical Theory*, 96-122.

Habermas's model of structural domination and critical self-reflection could sustain a critical theory of gender domination in the welfare state—a point I return to below.

In light of her critique of Habermas, Fraser proposes to replace his resistance to the internal colonization of the lifeworld with what she calls the politics of need interpretation. In contradistinction to Habermas's concern with the pathological, de-worlding effects of system media, Fraser's politics of need interpretation focus on the political struggles for cultural hegemony over the definition of needs in late capitalist societies. One of the distinctive marks of late capitalism, Fraser argues, is the rise of “needs talk...as a medium for the making and contesting of political claims.”<sup>22</sup> In Fraser's model, struggles over needs move through three stages: first, struggles to establish needs as objects of public concern; second, struggles between competing social groups for the authoritative definition of those now-public needs; and third, struggles between social movements and depoliticizing expert discourses that inevitably arise with the state recognition of needs. Such political contestation over needs is inevitable both because needs-claims are inherently contestable, giving rise to “ramified chains of ‘in-order-to’ relations”, and also because discourses about needs are internally dialogized—they cannot help but make reference to other, contesting interpretive frameworks.<sup>23</sup> Needs, then, are always both material and discursive, and this fact means that they will be the objects of political struggle between competing social interests, and especially between dominant and subordinate blocs: “needs talk appears as a site of struggle where groups with unequal discursive (and nondiscursive) resources compete to establish as hegemonic their respective interpretations of

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<sup>22</sup> Nancy Fraser, "Struggle over Needs: Outline of a Socialist-Feminist Critical Theory of Late Capitalist Political Culture," in *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse, and Gender in Contemporary Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 161.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 163, 65.

legitimate social needs.”<sup>24</sup> From this perspective, hegemonic interpretations will always indelibly mark the institutional structures through which needs are defined and met.

Fraser’s model, then, seeks to overcome the blind spots of Habermas’s theory. Insofar as it emphasizes the political power imbuing hegemonic needs-interpretations, it highlights, in ways Habermas’s theory does not, the role that intra-lifeworld domination plays in constituting the “problems” detected by the political system.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, its emphasis on discursive conflict shifts away from Habermas’ view of media-steered sub-systems in favor of an approach that treats terms like the economic as “cultural classifications and ideological labels.”<sup>26</sup> To designate something as part of the economic or political system, then, is to “depoliticize” it by casting it as a matter of private ownership or technical planning.<sup>27</sup> No doubt, this discursive reframing provides a great deal of critical leverage for theorizing gender domination in the welfare state. It draws attention to the constant interweaving of cultural norms and interpretations into the materiality of institutional politics. As Fraser points out, there can be no final need interpretation, and so every time a “runaway need” becomes objectified in an institutional structure, that institutional structure will, to some extent, reflect the balances of forces in society at that historical juncture.

Yet, in using the indeterminacy of needs as her critical starting point, Fraser’s reformulation leads her to an anti-institutionalist analysis that, ironically, repeats, rather than overcomes, the essentialism she attributes to Habermas. In particular, Fraser takes for granted

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>25</sup> For Habermas’s idea of the political system as “sluices” for issues from the lifeworld, see Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, 354-59.

<sup>26</sup> Fraser, “Struggle over Needs: Outline of a Socialist-Feminist Critical Theory of Late Capitalist Political Culture,” 166.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 168.

that the economic or administrative management of needs requires their depoliticization, reconfiguring them in terms of fixed, authoritative definitions. Thus, as social movements pressing new needs claims eventually manage to secure support from official political institutions, their claims are mediated by expert discourses that translate “politicized needs into administrable needs.”<sup>28</sup> These expert discourses must divorce such needs from broader socio-political structures and instead present them as discreet objects to be technically managed. Similarly, expert discourses represent need recipients as causally determined objects who will respond to their interventions, thereby effacing “dimensions of human agency that involve the construction and deconstruction of social meanings.”<sup>29</sup> Here, there is a subtle shift in Fraser’s emphasis: while she challenges Habermas for failing to fully incorporate domination into his account, here what is at stake is not domination but an even more exaggerated view of reification than the one Habermas supposedly proposes. Indeed, Fraser comes to accept the view that all institutionalization of needs claims will entail their objectification—with objectification understood as the construction of objects that are technically knowable and controllable. And in Fraser’s further development of her critical thought, these tensions reappear as the opposition between affirmative and transformative responses to economic and cultural injustices.<sup>30</sup>

Affirmative redresses presuppose and reify the social categories on which injustice rests (such as

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> "From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a "Postsocialist" Age," in *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the "Postsocialist" Condition* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 23-27. I would argue that, in Fraser's own terms, a "transformative" politics of redistribution or recognition is impossible—both redistribution and recognition are inherently affirmative political stances. This issue has received less attention than the adequacy of Fraser's analytic distinction between recognition and redistribution. For an exception, see Patchen Markell, *Bound by Recognition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 19-21, which criticizes Fraser for presenting the difference as a strategic choice rather than following from divergent forms of social critique. Indeed, Fraser later softens this opposition in Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking Recognition," *New Left Review* 3 (2000).

class, race, gender, or sexuality), while transformative redresses abolish, or at least render radically fluid, those constructs.

While I have no qualms with this distinction in and of itself (just as I have no qualms with concerns that most, if not all, currently hegemonic notions of expertise are technocratic), Fraser implicitly positions state welfare institutions as always affirmative and so undermining of transformative political possibilities. In contrast, the idea of the causality of fate enables us to analyze welfare institutions and struggles over the social as processes that open up relationships of domination to transformative challenges, even if only as a negative moment that will eventually manifest as a new institutional settlement still partially marked by domination. Welfare institutions, even as they may reinforce existing identity categories and need definitions, also open up spaces of political action that can mobilize those same institutions to generate solidaristic coalitions that directly challenge structures of domination. To better illustrate these possibilities and the dynamics through which they play out, I now want to turn to the history of gender emancipation in the Swedish welfare state as a case that crystalizes, in a particularly powerful way, these contradictory tendencies.

#### Contradictions of Emancipation: The First Breakthrough of Swedish Family Policy

For much of its history throughout the twentieth century, Sweden's welfare state has been held up as an aspirational model, an exemplar of how conscious political action and determined social movements could reconcile the forces of global economic competition with collective solidarity. In 1932, the Swedish Social Democrats (SAP) formed their first majority government and entered a long period of political hegemony, which was to end only in 1976 with the

formation of a non-socialist government lead by the Center Party.<sup>31</sup> While welfare state formation preceded the SAP's rise to supremacy—for instance, Sweden introduced the world's first national pension in 1906—their hegemonic position enabled them to pursue comprehensive and universalist social guarantees tied to active labor market institutions and counter-cyclical monetary policies. These universalist aspirations were embodied in programs such as the General Supplementary Pension (APT), introduced in 1959, which enshrined equal, publicly funded income replacement for all workers as a basic principle of Sweden's social politics. For observers, the SAP's success reflected both their ability to forge cross-class alliances with farmers (the famous Red-Green coalition) and white-collar workers as well as their rejection of rigid Marxist orthodoxy in favor of reformist political agency. In short, Sweden provides the model for what a universal social-democratic welfare state can and ought to look like.

This political exemplarity extends to Sweden's pursuit of gender equality through state social policy. Currently leading the European Union's gender equality index, with almost equal labor force participation between men and women, Sweden also fares well in studies of gender equality in time devoted to household tasks.<sup>32</sup> Swedish political parties across the spectrum publicly subscribe to a gender equality framework, and the Swedish state has pioneered gender mainstreaming as a policy paradigm.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, the roots of Sweden's concern with gender

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<sup>31</sup> Francis Sejersted, *The Age of Social Democracy: Norway and Sweden in the Twentieth-Century*, trans. Richard Daly (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 159.

<sup>32</sup> Hook, "Gender Inequality in the Welfare State: Sex Segregation in Housework, 1965-2003," 1512; Ann Numhauser-Henning, "The Policy in Gender Equality in Sweden," (Brussels: Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, European Parliament, 2015).

<sup>33</sup> Diane Sainsbury and Christina Bergqvist, "The Promise and Pitfalls of Gender Mainstreaming," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 11, no. 2 (2009). Nonetheless, women still take a disproportionate amount of care-work and family leave. Jenny Ahlberg, Christine Roman, and Simon Duncan, "Actualizing the ‘Democratic Family’? Swedish Policy Rhetoric Versus Family Practices," *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society* 15, no. 1 (2008); Guðný Björk and Rostgaard Tine Eydal, "Gender Equality Revisited –

equality run remarkably deep. Even as Sweden was relatively late to introduce universal suffrage (1919), the struggle for voting rights produced a strong infrastructure of feminist groups and organizations, one that cut across class and party lines. As Diane Sainsbury observes, “one effect of the protracted Swedish struggle for suffrage was the continuance of the cross-class alliance in women’s politics into the 1920s and 1930s, after it had been dissolved by male politicians... Liberal and social democratic women maintained close ties during the 1920s and 1930s. They worked to increase women’s representation in parliament and to improve maternity benefits, child welfare, the situation of solo mothers, and the rights of professional and working women.”<sup>34</sup> As a result of this first breakthrough for gender equality in 1930s, Swedish policy discourse, for the first time, took the family as a potential object of political intervention, thereby rendering gender relations a matter of public concern. Another important result of these struggles was that Sweden did not restrict female employment during the depression. At the same time, though, with its narrow focus on public support to help families balance work with child rearing so as to encourage larger families, the policy breakthrough of the 1930s still presumed the single-breadwinner family model. It was not until the 1960s that equality itself would become the explicit goal of policy interventions—when gender domination itself would be named as the problem that political mobilization must address. The most significant result was the introduction of individual taxation in 1970, although this accompanied other moves in the direction of gender neutrality, such as further bans on gender discrimination in the labor market, a transition from maternity insurance to parental leave insurance, and increasing public support for childcare. The

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Changes in Nordic Childcare Policies in the 2000s," *Social Policy & Administration* 45, no. 2 (2011): 166.

<sup>34</sup> Diane Sainsbury, "Gender and the Making of Welfare States: Norway and Sweden," *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society* 8, no. 1 (2001): 128-29.

1960s breakthrough laid the foundation for Sweden's contemporary concern with equality and unraveling gender domination.

Evaluations of Sweden's social and economic politics, however, have not always been so effusive. Indeed, much as it currently functions as a utopian embodiment of political desires, Sweden previously exemplified the corporatist depoliticization of conflicts in the welfare state, according to which expansive social policies required elite-level economic planning and negotiations via encompassing organizations shielded from democratic contestation and accountability.<sup>35</sup> And such ambivalent evaluations of Sweden's social politics are further amplified by the peculiar location Sweden plays in the global economy. As a small, export-oriented manufacturer, Sweden's expansive welfare policies are functionally adapted to the sort of highly-rationalized manufacturing and job market flexibility necessary to respond to the imperatives of capital accumulation. Sweden's ability to forge its exemplary solidaristic policies depends, to an extent, on labor's willingness to participate in the intensification of capital by encouraging high-productivity sectors and abandoning lower-performing firms.<sup>36</sup> Similar criticisms have been advanced at the evolution of Sweden's gender and family policy. Thus, Marika Lindholm characterizes the early Swedish response to the women's movement as a "conservative revolution," insofar as the concrete institutionalizations of gender equality was driven less by women's direct activism than by "the forces of class formation and class struggle" and the processes of "urbanization, proletarianization, and industrialization."<sup>37</sup> Lindholm's skeptical analysis is driven by the fact that the gains of the women's movement were achieved

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<sup>35</sup> Schmitter, "Still the Century of Corporatism?."

<sup>36</sup> For instance, the chief economist of the Swedish Employers Association remarked in the 1940s that "it is considered to be something almost criminal not to be flexible." Quoted in Sejersted, *The Age of Social Democracy: Norway and Sweden in the Twentieth-Century*, 222.

<sup>37</sup> Marika Lindholm, "Swedish Feminism, 1835–1945: A Conservative Revolution," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 4, no. 2 (1991): 139.

through male-dominated political parties that sought the political incorporation of women so as to further their own, non-feminist (although not necessarily anti-feminist) agendas. Moreover, the achievements of the women's movement were intimately bound up with the dynamics of Sweden's labor market, as policy actors increasingly came to recognize that the organization of the family was an economic question that affected Sweden's labor supply and labor market structure. One manifest result of how the pursuit of gender equality has been conditioned by these structural imperatives is the gender segregation of Sweden's labor market, with women overrepresented in lower-paying public sector careers and under-represented in the private sector.<sup>38</sup>

How can we account for the ambiguity and duality of the process of women's emancipation in Sweden? In this and the following section, I want to examine the contradictory structure of Sweden's two major gender policy breakthroughs: the introduction of family policy in the 1930s and the introduction of gender equality policies in the 1960s. In both cases, I am particularly concerned with how state-centric gender policies were conditioned by and interwoven with economic imperatives arising from the structural shifts in capitalism. The changes in the status of women in Sweden, like the formation of the Swedish social policy and its economic governance regime more generally, reflect the materialization of emancipatory claims and movements in institutional structures conditioned by, but not reducible to, these instrumental forces.

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<sup>38</sup> For helpful critical reflections along these lines, see Ruth Lister, "A Nordic Nirvana? Gender, Citizenship, and Social Justice in the Nordic Welfare States," *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society* 16, no. 2 (2009); Ann Shola Orloff, "Should Feminists Aim for Gender Symmetry?: Why the Dual-Earner/Dual-Carer Model May Not Be Every Feminist's Utopia," in *Gender Equality: Transforming Gender Divisions of Labor*, ed. Erik Olin Wright (London: Verson, 2009).

And this is because, I argue, the social policy institutions that took women and the family as objects of public discourse and state action also functioned as worldly objects around which women's organizations could mobilize and articulate their claims to unconditional equality. Even as those institutions embodied hierarchical gender norms and structures of domination, they also materialized those same norms such that they could be subject to political challenge and potential transformation. Thus, the story of women's emancipation in Sweden also represents a particular enactment of the causality of fate and the dialectic of morality: the externalization and materialization of gender norms in new welfare institutions rendered explicit the suppressed, exploitative structure of gender domination. What was experienced as a causality of fate was now set loose as something requiring discursive redemption. Indeed, feminist discourse positioned male domination as structurally akin to Hegel's criminal, who suppresses a common life context by extracting a surplus of labor from the community. Yet more so than in Habermas's account of the dialectic of morality, which at times seemed to imply the finality of the moment of insight—in his story, the causality of fate of revolutionary violence produced a moral reconciliation that dissolved the class agents—the practice of the Swedish feminist movement shows that emancipatory politics entails the ongoing repetition of the dialectic of morality, as at no moment have relations of domination become fully transparent and given way to unconstrained communication and mutual recognition. In this respect, these practices attest to Butler's insight into the permanently incomplete nature of project of turning melancholy into mourning.

In all, then, the history of women's emancipation through the welfare state evinces a contradictory structure of politicization and conflict displacement. Even as welfare institutions and social policies were vital for turning gender domination into the object of political action and

for materially altering the relative position of women, those same institutions provided a mechanism for improving the position of women without directly compelling men to recognize their role as dominators, thereby averting more divisive political confrontations. Indeed, in its earliest institutional manifestations and political mobilizations, the Swedish women's movement was caught up in an ambivalent relationship to the social and to established political institutions. For many participants in women's early political struggles, social issues provided an expedient avenue for women to gain recognition as political actors. The first Swedish women's organization, the Fredrika Bremer Association (*Fredrika-Bremer-Förbundet* (FBF)), was founded in 1884, and initially advanced a liberal feminist line focused on equality.<sup>39</sup> Yet while, in some respects, the FBF's claims were narrowing focused on equal formal rights for women, such that it spoke mainly to the concerns of upper-middle class constituencies, the early FBF also constituted a space in which the social processes of gender construction itself could be thematized, critically scrutinized, and transcended.<sup>40</sup> Yet as the FBF became more institutionally established, its leadership shifted the organization's focus towards social issues and the social improvement of women. In part, this increasing pragmatism was driven by the practical exigencies of the struggle for suffrage. But the turn towards the social was also driven by the more general rise of maternalist rhetoric in the late nineteenth century.<sup>41</sup> In Sweden, Ellen Key's strongly maternalist writings were the most pronounced manifestation of this trend, and she

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<sup>39</sup> For a history of the society's activities and ideological currents, see Ulla Manns, "Gender and Feminism in Sweden: The Fredrika Bremer Association," in *Women's Emancipation Movements in the Nineteenth Century: A European Perspective*, ed. Sylvia Paetschek and Bianka Pietrow-Ennker (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 158; Gunnar Qvist, "Policy Towards Women and the Women's Struggle in Sweden," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 5, no. 1-4 (1980): 63-64.

<sup>41</sup> For the general rise of this discourse, see Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, "Womanly Duties: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States in France, Germany, Great Britain, and the United States, 1880-1920," *The American Historical Review* 95, no. 4 (1990); *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of the Welfare State* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

criticized the FBF for failing to recognize the distinctive vocation of mothering and, as a result, neglecting the social conditions of mothers, especially working mothers.<sup>42</sup> Partially in response to Key's criticisms, but also driven by the growing recognition and incorporation of women into Swedish society, in the 1890s and early-twentieth century the FBF increasingly focused on social welfare concerns, such as housing, childbirth, and maternal health, alongside its struggle for suffrage and against prohibitions on night work. To an extent, the early history of the FBF embodies the familiar equality/difference dilemma that so characterizes women's engagement with the welfare state. Insofar as women sought to gain recognition in a society that only viewed men's work as work, they had to valorize modes of labor characteristically viewed as female.<sup>43</sup> However, what is also notable is the extent to which the turn to social reform enabled the FBF to evade the equality/difference dilemma and accommodate both difference and equality perspectives. In other words, a focus on social improvement, both with regards to women's location *in* society as well as women's potential contribution *to* society, enabled early Swedish feminists to advance both equality and difference claims without directly challenging the established order of gender domination.

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<sup>42</sup> There is controversy about the extent to which Key's writings were maternalist. Certainly, she called for social recognition of mother and care-giving, and this fit with a broadly socialist agenda to provide public support for mothers. For some commentators, this shows she was actually ahead of her time in challenging the gender division of labor. Yet she also drew on Darwinian views to argue that women were more evolutionarily and biologically suited for mothering (as they had not faced the selection pressure men had faced in the working world) and that mothering constituted their higher contribution to society. For contrasting views, see Yvonne Hirdman and Michel Vale, "Utopia in the Home," *International Journal of Political Economy* 22, no. 2 (1992); Torborg Lundell, "Ellen Key and Swedish Feminists Views on Motherhood," *Scandinavian Studies* 56, no. 4 (1984): 23-24.

<sup>43</sup> On these dilemmas of social citizenship, see Carole Pateman, "The Patriarchal Welfare State," in *Democracy and the Welfare State*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); Wendy Sarvasy, "Social Citizenship from a Feminist Perspective," *Hypatia* 12, no. 4 (1997).

Within the Social Democrats, feminist activists faced similar pressures to reformulate their claims in the less threatening terms of social improvement.<sup>44</sup> Founded in 1889, the Swedish Social Democratic Party (SAP), like most European labor parties, initially focused primarily on the concerns of the male working-class. The parliamentary representatives of the party sided with the interests of their male members when they supported the 1909 protective legislation banning night shifts for women, despite opposition from the FBF and the party's women members. Despite these betrayals, the party had an active female membership, and official support for women's clubs dated back to 1894. Between 1902 and 1909, there was also a Women's Trade Union, although this was eventually folded into the Tailor's Union, which reduced women's representation in Social Democratic conferences. The influence of this early independence lived on through the Women's Trade Union's publication, *Morning Breeze*, which remained the SAP's women's publication. Perhaps most notably, women had to go their own way on suffrage when the party executive, in 1905, postponed supporting universal suffrage so that they could prioritize male suffrage.<sup>45</sup> This inadvertently pushed socialist women into an alliance with their bourgeois counterparts. While middle-class activists achieved women's suffrage in municipalities by including a property restriction (1908), they were only able to achieve national suffrage by allying themselves with socialist women and dropping their support for property qualifications—an alliance that achieved the full franchise in 1919.

This new electoral reality induced the party to create Women's Federation (SSKF) so as to attract more female members and voters. However, the creation of the federation did not result

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<sup>44</sup> The following overview draws on Renée Frangeur, "Social Democrats and the Women Question in Sweden: A History of Contradiction," in *Women and Socialism, Socialism and Women: Europe between the Two World Wars*, ed. Helmut Gruber and Pamela Graves (New York: Berghahn Books, 1998).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 429.

in greater acknowledgement of men's power over women, either within the party or in workers' situation more generally.<sup>46</sup> And it certainly did not result in greater acknowledgement that, as a result of these broad structures of domination, women could have divergent interests from the male members of the party. Indeed, the founding mandate for the Women's Federation avoided the issue of gender domination and inequality, instead calling for a focus on "those political and social questions which especially affect the interest of women, their children and homes."<sup>47</sup> As Gunnel Karlsson notes, throughout its history the Women's Federation in the SAP was caught in a bind in which "the transformation of questions from "women's issue" into more or less gender-neutral family issues" was a "a necessary strategy to ensure that such issues actually reached party level, and did not fade into oblivion."<sup>48</sup>

Twice, Swedish Social Democratic women's clubs attempted to submit resolutions that called for labeling as scabs men who abandon their children—first to the Social Democratic Party Conference (1905) and then at the Social Democratic Women's Conference (1910).<sup>49</sup> This effort contains a striking logic, one that would become more familiar in radical feminist critiques in the 1960s: just as the ideology of the market enables capitalists to exploit workers, so too does

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<sup>46</sup> Thus, while the party reversed course on whether to have a women's federation, they still operated according to the logic the party leadership expressed when it rejected a federation in 1908: that a federation would be unnecessary because working-class men and women "always have the same interests" and so the opinions of a women's federation "would always coincide with the party." Gunnel Karlsson, "Social Democratic Women's Coup in the Swedish Parliament," in *Is There a Nordic Feminism? Nordic Feminist Thought on Culture and Society*, ed. Drude von der Fehr, Bente Rosenbeck, and Anna G. Jónasdóttir (London: Routledge, 1998), 49.

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in Frangeur, "Social Democrats and the Women Question in Sweden: A History of Contradiction," 430.

<sup>48</sup> Karlsson, "Social Democratic Women's Coup in the Swedish Parliament," 50. "Instead of discussing the distribution of power and other values between women and men, the issue is transformed and presented in connection with, say, family policy, which, viewed from the perspective of gender conflict, is hardly a controversial matter." Ibid., 47.

<sup>49</sup> Frangeur, "Social Democrats and the Women Question in Sweden: A History of Contradiction," 425-26.

the ideology of gender difference enable men to exploit women by extracting their surplus child-rearing labor. Male workers who take advantage of that power relationship are no different than individual workers who abandon solidarity and side with the capitalists by breaking a strike. Not surprisingly, neither was even translated for inclusion in the official list of party resolutions at either conference.<sup>50</sup> During the 1920s, gender conflict remained salient in the party, as many male SAP parliamentary representatives sought restrictions on women's working so as to shore up the single-breadwinner family model. However, the party leadership sided decisively with the women members, with Per Albin Hansson going so far as to compare the pro-restrictions representatives to National Socialists.<sup>51</sup> Hansson would later prove central for the movement of so-called "women's issues" from the periphery to the center of party rhetoric.

And this was made possible, in part, by the ideological reorientation of the SAP that Hansson pioneered. In 1928, Hansson was elected party chairman and gave a speech that was to come to define the ideological contours of Swedish Social Democracy. In the speech, Hansson famously redefined the goals of the SAP as building "the People's Home" (*Folkhemmet*). While it had deep roots in Swedish political discourse, Hansson's embrace of the idea of the people's home steered the SAP away from its identity as a strictly class-based party that could, following Second International views, await the increasingly polarization of capitalist society, a polarization that would place the industrial working class in a majority position. On the economic front, this meant a retreat in political ambition—a retreat that was informed by the desire for cooperation among the labor elite within the LO (*Landsorganisationen*: the overarching trade union group), the disastrous large strike of 1909 that discredited a general

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<sup>50</sup> Within the party grassroots, these more radical strains increasingly competed with Key's maternalism, which provided women members with recognition and a rationale without pushing them into conflicts with male members. *Ibid.*, 439.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 436.

strike strategy, and the surprise loss of seats in the 1928 election, which was expected to bring gains for the SAP. Yet, for social policy, as opposed to economic democracy, the people's home opened up a new front. The idea of the people's home enabled the SAP to form cross-class coalitions in pursuit of social solidarity, a strategy that paid dividends in the so-called "cow trade" crisis settlement with the agrarian Center Party, according to which the Center Party supported the SAP's active labor market policies during the Depression in exchange for ongoing agricultural subsidies. The Red-Green alliance, and later the coalition between industrial workers and salaried professionals, would provide the crucial political foundation for the formation of Sweden's comprehensive social welfare policies.<sup>52</sup>

In the first place, then, the metaphor of the people's home announced that the SAP would become a party of the whole nation. The idea of the home pointed to potential harmonization of interests and perspectives of society's members: "in a good home, equality, consideration, cooperation, and helpfulness are the guiding rules. If all this is seen as applying to a nation's and citizens' home, then it will mean the dispersal of the social barriers that now divide the citizens."<sup>53</sup> And, in these terms, Hansson directly appealed to the SAP's female members to make the people's home "bright and happy" by attending to the "comfort and well-being" of its

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<sup>52</sup> Peter Baldwin, *The Politics of Social Solidarity: Class Bases of the European Welfare State, 1875-1975* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*.

<sup>53</sup> Quoted in Seppo Hentilä, "The Origins of the Folkhem Ideology in Swedish Social Democracy," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 3, no. 1-4 (1978): 327. There is a question, of course, of whether this was simply a rhetorical move to attract parliamentary support or if it marked a more fundamental realignment of Hansson and the SAP's attitude towards political confrontation. As Sejersted notes, during the suffrage negotiations of 1918 Hansson "did not hesitate to advocate extraparliamentary means." Sejersted, *The Age of Social Democracy: Norway and Sweden in the Twentieth-Century*, 160.

members.<sup>54</sup> Even as Hansson's deployment of idea of the people's home reinscribed women's subordinate role within the party, however, it opened up discursive space to de-center the concerns of male workers in the party's theoretical landscape. Thus, as Hirdman notes, as a result of the rise of the people's home, "the question of how women's lives should be organized became a strategical means for a thorough reform of capitalist society."<sup>55</sup> The consumption patterns, division of labor, and interior architecture of the home was now a political concern that rivaled, even if never fully equaled, questions of collective bargaining, workers' protections, and workplace control. Indeed, in the background for Hansson's use of the metaphor of the people's home was the perception of a crisis in households—a crisis of inadequate housing supply, inappropriate housing conditions, and irrational consumption patterns. A new field of social-democratic policy intervention was emerging.

Notably, the reorientation of the SAP coincided with, and reinforced, the rising anxiety about Sweden's slowing rates of population growth. Two years after Hansson became Prime Minister, the question of Sweden's population was thrust into the forefront of public debates with the publication of Alva and Gunnar Myrdal's *Kris I befolkningsfrågan (Crisis in the Population Question)*.<sup>56</sup> Published in 1934, the text became a landmark in the formation of Swedish family policy. Just as Hansson's use of the term the people's home had drawn into SAP rhetoric a set of associations from non-socialist national traditions, the Myrdal's were able to deftly appropriate conservative and bourgeois anxieties about Sweden's national population

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<sup>54</sup> Quoted in Frangeur, "Social Democrats and the Women Question in Sweden: A History of Contradiction," 440.

<sup>55</sup> Hirdman and Vale, "Utopia in the Home," 29.

<sup>56</sup> An English edition, which included the population committee reports, was later release as Alva Myrdal, *Nation and Family: The Swedish Experiment in Democratic Family and Population Policy* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1941).

growth for a broader social reform agenda.<sup>57</sup> The Myrdal's broke with those traditions by translating the population question into a social-scientific idiom—the decline of birth rates was now to be located in the contradictory location of the family in a capitalist society. And so both the overall population and the family could now become the objects of state policy-making: “the population question is here transformed into the most effective argument for a thorough and radical socialist remodeling of society.”<sup>58</sup> The bourgeois family, they declared, was dead. In an earlier article for the *Morning Breeze*, Alva Myrdal argued that the “we no longer have the justification to talk about the ‘family’ and mean the same thing in the present [as we did] one hundred years ago.”<sup>59</sup> Popular discourse about the family looked back “to society before industrialization,” yet the rise of wage-labor dissolved the economic bonds that had lead to family formation for large swaths of the population.<sup>60</sup> Industrialization had reduced the economic inducements that previously lead to family formation for large swaths of the population, and the smaller, bourgeois family was appropriate to the era of early industrialization when general social interests were not clearly recognized.<sup>61</sup> Yet the bourgeois family was rendering itself extinct by failing to reproduce at a level to sustain Sweden’s population. The individual interest in family planning was contradicting society’s general interest in a sustainable population level.

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<sup>57</sup> On the relationship between Hansson and earlier national traditions, see Sejersted, *The Age of Social Democracy: Norway and Sweden in the Twentieth-Century*, 161. On the mild nationalism of the Myrdals, see Allan C. Carlson, *The Swedish Experiment in Family Policy: The Myrdals and the Interwar Population Crisis* (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1990), 84.

<sup>58</sup> Quoted in *The Swedish Experiment in Family Policy: The Myrdals and the Interwar Population Crisis*, 89.

<sup>59</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 63.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> In the Myrdal’s view, the modernization process means that the economic, educative, protective, and even recreational functions of the family are increasingly taken over by public, social institutions. This focuses the family on its affective functions, although at the cost of smaller families and a lower birth rate. Myrdal, *Nation and Family: The Swedish Experiment in Democratic Family and Population Policy*, 5-6.

Furthermore, the social structures adequate to the bourgeois family discouraged family-formation and child rearing by the ascendant working class. The era of the individual and the individualistic family was over. Rather, the family should be reconceived as part of the “great national household,” with key functions of the family socialized so as to induce individuals to raise a socially necessary number of children.<sup>62</sup>

Both Hannson’s image of the people’s home and population question as advanced by the Myrdals opened up a contradictory field for political challenges to gender domination. On the one hand, both moves partially universalized what had previously been segmented as “women’s issues.” This was most obvious in the Myrdals’ efforts to link family policy to population decline and broader concerns about the quality of Sweden’s workforce and its suitability for industrial society.<sup>63</sup> Of course, these modes of universalization co-existed uneasily with more explicitly eugenicist arguments for engineering the quality of the population stock.<sup>64</sup> Yet the idea of the people’s home and other aspects of the Myrdals’ arguments produced alternate universalizing logics: both discourses positioned consumption and housing patterns as central economic and political concerns with effects beyond the family. The issue of population concerned “the whole fabric of society.”<sup>65</sup> The technological rationalization of the household would now drive modern industrial production, and women’s participation in the workforce would both provide a new reservoir of skilled workers and create demand for services. The people’s home implied a partial

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<sup>62</sup> Quoted in Carlson, *The Swedish Experiment in Family Policy: The Myrdals and the Interwar Population Crisis*.

<sup>63</sup> As Alva Myrdal declared, “technical developments seem to be moving toward heightening the requirements with regard to the quality of human beings.” Quoted in Hirdman and Vale, “Utopia in the Home,” 36.

<sup>64</sup> Alberto Spektorowski and Elisabet Mizrachi, “Eugenics and the Welfare State in Sweden: The Politics of Social Margins and the Idea of a Productive Society,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 39, no. 3 (2004).

<sup>65</sup> Myrdal, *Nation and Family: The Swedish Experiment in Democratic Family and Population Policy*, 2.

equalization of the traditional, demand-side concerns of wages, work, and production—concerns that focused around the political conditions of male workers—with supply-side issues of household consumption. From the perspective of the national household, gender relations could no longer be segmented off from industrial relations.<sup>66</sup> Nonetheless, this universalization of family issues, even as it thematized and potentially politicized gender relations and gender domination within the family, did so through an instrumentalist discourse that validated the claims of feminists only in terms of the economic imperatives of Sweden's national community.<sup>67</sup> As Gunnar Karlsson argues with regards to the location of family policy in the SAP, “instead of discussing the distribution of power and other values between women and men, the issue is transformed and presented in connection with...family policy, which, viewed from the perspective of gender conflict, is hardly a controversial matter.”<sup>68</sup> Well into the 1970s, women within the SAP deployed the language of “gender-neutral family issues” so as to “ensure

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<sup>66</sup> As the Myrdals wrote, “the tendency is toward organization and management through social policy, not only with regard to the division of incomes in society but also with regard to consumption decisions within the family.” Quoted in Sejersted, *The Age of Social Democracy: Norway and Sweden in the Twentieth-Century*, 245.

<sup>67</sup> And this is closely connected to how the Myrdals embraced a Weberian, instrumentalist view of the relationship between ultimate values and technical planning, one which theoretically downplayed any intrinsic connection between institutional reforms and the generation of spaces of political appearance that could constitute new political groups who would sustain and advance democratic reform efforts. For Gunnar Myrdal, the objects of policy-making are “weak creatures” who are “unfaithful to their own ideals” because of “short term-interests and jealousies.” Formal political institutions, lead by planners and intellectuals, enabled “higher values” to “come into their own on a more universal level, where they exercise more influence.” Quoted in Hirdman and Vale, “Utopia in the Home,” 31. Perhaps not surprisingly, then, both Myrdals were extremely interesting in public architecture and housing design—a medium through which they hoped they could directly influence the living and consumption patterns of Swedish families, directly engineering the contours of the everyday.

<sup>68</sup> Karlsson, “Social Democratic Women’s Coup in the Swedish Parliament,” 47.

that such issues actually reached the party level, and did not fade into oblivion”—a legacy of the structure of both the people’s home project and the Myrdal’s intervention in the 1930s.<sup>69</sup>

In no small part due to the Myrdal’s public intervention, family policy became a central concern of Swedish government policy and public discourse during the 1930s. “Without the massive interest in the ‘population question,’” writes Åsa Lundqvist, “the family would probably not have been constituted as an object of political intervention.”<sup>70</sup> Because of it was sparked by the issue of population, family policy in the 1930s focused on “increasing fertility, stabilizing family formation (and gender relations), and enhancing the economic conditions for families with children.”<sup>71</sup> Initial resistance in popular SAP outlets gave way to rising appreciation among the party leadership that the population issue was becoming a defining issue. In early 1935, the non-socialist parties passed a resolution in the Riksdag that called the population issue “a question of the continued existence of the Swedish people.”<sup>72</sup> Finally, the SAP Social Minister Gustav Möller, in response to the Budget Committee, officially formed the Royal Population Commission, which was to produce proposals for the 1936 sitting of the Riksdag.<sup>73</sup> Although he suggested that Alva serve instead, the SAP leadership insisted that the leading social democratic representative on the commission should be male, and so Gunnar joined the commission and, due to his personal energy, claim to expertise, and network in the Swedish research community,

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>70</sup> Åsa Lundqvist, *Family Policy Paradoxes: Gender Equality and Labor Market Regulation 1930-2010* (Bristol: The Policy Press, 2011), 129.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>72</sup> Carlson, *The Swedish Experiment in Family Policy: The Myrdals and the Interwar Population Crisis*, 116.

<sup>73</sup> The expert commission was and continues to be a standard mode of policy-formation in Sweden.

came to dominate its research and deliberations.<sup>74</sup> The commission released a series of reports in 1935 and 1936 on a broad range of topics, but amongst its most central proposals were reforms to the Swedish tax code to encourage marriage and extensive new supports for both mothers and children.

Gunnar Myrdal was elected to the Riksdag in 1935, and the 1936 election was fought largely on issues arising from the population commission, which the SAP rode to a strong victory. The 1937 sitting of the Riksdag became known as the “mothers and babies” session, during which the SAP passed laws providing for additional prenatal care and delivery assistance, means-tested maternity support and motherhood allowances as well as motherhood support through sickness insurance funds.<sup>75</sup> The 1938 sitting took up further issues from the commission reports, loosening restrictions on abortion and contraceptives, increasing tax deductions for families with three or more children, and banning employment discrimination on the basis of marriage, pregnancy, or childbirth.<sup>76</sup> With war on the horizon, the wave of reforms came to an end. In late 1938, the SAP government declared a “reform pause” so as to consolidate the budget and move resources into armaments. The Myrdals left Sweden for America, returning only after the war.

#### Equality and Participation: The Radicalization and Displacement of Gender Conflict

In the most immediate respects—as a response to the population crisis—these reforms were successful. As Sejerstedt notes, “the population crisis was overcome. During the hegemonic phase of Social Democracy, from approximately 1940 to 1970, marriage rates reached record

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<sup>74</sup> The activities of the commission are recounted in detail in Carlson, *The Swedish Experiment in Family Policy: The Myrdals and the Interwar Population Crisis*, 129-54.

<sup>75</sup> Lundqvist, *Family Policy Paradoxes: Gender Equality and Labor Market Regulation 1930-2010*, 32. Gunnar Myrdal supported universal rather than means-tested maternity benefits but lost due to budgetary constraints.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 35.

highs. The birthrate was higher than during the 1930s, while at the same time the number of children born out of wedlock was extremely low.<sup>77</sup> At the same time, and not accidentally, the reforms of the 1930s and 1940s functioned to reinforce the single-male breadwinner family model. The public discourse and institutional models of the 1940s and 1950s “still glorified motherhood and the nuclear family.”<sup>78</sup> Women did not enter the workforce in large numbers, nor was there a marked redistribution of care-work within the family. Only 30% of women worked outside of the household, and these rates were lower for married women during typical child-raising years.<sup>79</sup> Maternity benefits and prenatal care certainly improved the ability of women to support their families, but they did not alter the fundamental structure of family relationships or the division of household labor.

Yet the rise of a conscious family policy regime, especially as it came to be interwoven with Sweden’s labor market institutions, created a set of institutional objects and discursive spaces in which feminist activists could, in the 1960s, advance a more transformative challenge to Sweden’s established gender patterns. Just as in the 1930s efforts to alter gender relationships were inextricably bound up with the population crisis, in the 1960s the radicalization of family social policy was structured by the dynamics of Sweden’s labor market. Already in 1960, the Swedish government emphasized the need to find a solution to Sweden’s projected labor

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<sup>77</sup> Sejersted, *The Age of Social Democracy: Norway and Sweden in the Twentieth-Century*, 247. This success was also driven by the post-war economic boom—a boom from which Sweden particularly because of its quasi-neutrality during the war.

<sup>78</sup> Lundqvist, *Family Policy Paradoxes: Gender Equality and Labor Market Regulation 1930-2010*, 61.

<sup>79</sup> Jane Lewis and Gertrude Åström, "Equality, Difference, and State Welfare: Labor Market and Family Policies in Sweden," *Feminist Studies* 18, no. 1 (1992): 66. Recently, though, some have argued that these rates undercounted women’s part-time work in the 1950s. Sejersted, *The Age of Social Democracy: Norway and Sweden in the Twentieth-Century*, 248.

shortage, with demand for workers projected to increase 13% between 1960 and 1965.<sup>80</sup> The labor shortages coincided with the emergence of both a new public debate on gender equality and gender roles as well as of well-positioned feminist activists within key state and welfare institutions. While other countries—most notably Germany—responded to the demand for workers by introducing guest worker policies, Swedish actors saw the labor shortages as an opportunity to bring women into the workforce and so to discursively reframe family policy in terms of labor power and labor reserves.

Some scholars have gone so far as to argue that Swedish policy-makers only abandoned the single-male breadwinner model as a result of their inability to use immigration to shore up those institutions. Thus, Jason Jordan argues that because Sweden did not have a tradition of guest worker programs, they were constrained to focus on female labor force participation as a response to the labor shortage.<sup>81</sup> Yet, in my view, the historical evidence suggests that Swedish policy makers and feminists used the labor shortage to advance their equality project. Indeed, there are several factors that Jordan fails to account for that made the SAP and Swedish labor unions more receptive to feminist claims than their German equivalents, including comprehensive wage structures that made immigrant labor less affordable, competition from the Liberal party for female voters, the alliance between blue-collar and white-collar workers that made the SAP less exclusively focused on protecting the interests of industrial workers, and institutions like the Swedish National Labour Market Board (AMS) where feminist bureaucrats could advance their projects. At the same time, as I will argue, this strategy was not without

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<sup>80</sup> Jonas Hinnfors, "Stability through Change: Swedish Parties and Family Policies, 1960-1980," in *State Policy and Gender System in the Two German States and Sweden 1945-1989*, ed. Rolf Torstendahl, Opuscula Historica Upsaliensia (Uppsala: Distribution, Dept. of History, Uppsala Universitet, 1999), 115.

<sup>81</sup> Jason Jordan, "Mothers, Wives, and Workers: Explaining Gendered Dimensions of the Welfare State," *Comparative Political Studies* 39, no. 9 (2006).

continuing contradictions. In particular, Swedish state feminists used the labor market shortage to try to equalize the position of women without directly challenging what Yvonne Hirdmann calls the “male norm” in the Swedish welfare state. The underlying assumption of employment growth meant that the gains of women would not come at the expense of the inherited privileges of male workers, such as their hegemony within the better-paying industrial labor market. Instead, female workers largely entered the public sector, leading to the marked gender segregation of the Swedish workforce as well as political and economic crisis tendencies. Thus, in retrospect, the emancipation of Swedish women through welfare institutions produced a contradictory dynamic: at once enabling direct challenges to and alterations of structures of male domination and yet also displacing those conflicts and the more fundamental social transformations they potentially augured.

The 1960s stands as the heyday of social-democratic economic and social policymaking. Indeed, the projected labor shortages were a product of the success of the SAP’s full-employment strategy, which was guided by the so-called Rehn-Meidner model. The Rehn-Meidner model, developed by the LO economists Gösta Rehn and Rudolf Meidner in the late 1940s, called for solidaristic wage-bargaining that, by artificially raising wages at the lower end, would induce productivity growth and, in combination with economic openness, squeeze out less efficient sectors.<sup>82</sup> At the same time, the inflationary pressures of the higher-end of the wage spectrum were to be held down through solidaristic bargaining and taxation policies that decreased the purchasing power of workers. Finally—and here was what proved to be a crucial political vulnerability of the Rehn-Meidner model—the model had to deal with the problem of

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<sup>82</sup> For an overview of the logic behind and eventual breakdown of the Rehn-Meidner model, see Jonas Pontusson, *The Limits of Social Democracy: Investment Politics in Sweden* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992); "At the End of the Third Road: Swedish Social Democracy in Crisis," *Politics and Society* 20, no. 3 (1992).

under-investment. Efficient firms would be under-profitable due to the combination of high wages and international competition, which ruled out protectionist policies that passed excessive wage costs onto consumers. The solution was to socialize investment through public saving and restrictive fiscal policies. The wage-earner funds proposal advanced by the LO in the late 1960s was the most radical manifestation of this imperative—and one which showed that the Rehn-Meidner model ultimately required some partial democratization of the ownership structure of capital. These background institutional conditions for the labor shortages of the 1960s are important, as women ended up entering the labor force just as the Rehn-Meidner model was coming under increasing political strain. Nonetheless, for policy actors in the 1960s, full employment policies in the private sector were the assumed horizon of efforts to alter the career trajectories of female citizens.

These structural factors were crucial background conditions for the acceptance of a dual-earning family model. At the same time, though, the 1960s witnessed a concerted effort to shift the public discourse around gender norms, moving from the 1930s emphasis on the people's home, where women would participate but through their role in the family, to a rhetoric of gender equality (*jämstähllhet*). The 1960 election saw the Liberal Party campaign on the issue of justice for women, a move that put pressure on the SAP to more explicitly foreground their concern for gender equality.<sup>83</sup> At that year's SAP convention, activists managed to pass a resolution that affirmed that “the struggle for equality, which was started by workers in the old capitalist society, has been widened to a struggle for equivalent treatment for all citizens, whether they be men or women.”<sup>84</sup> Another important shift in public discourse came in 1962,

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<sup>83</sup> Jane Jenson and Mahon Rianne, "Representing Solidarity: Class, Gender and the Crisis in Social-Democratic Sweden," *New Left Review*, no. 201 (1993): 85-86.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 86.

whe the journalist Eva Moberg published an influential article on women's "conditional liberation." In it, she challenged the view, popular in the 1950s, that the task of family policy was to help women balance care-giving with participation in the workforce.<sup>85</sup> For Moberg, the idea of balancing women's two roles could only result in a "paroled liberation," one in which women's main task was still "to care for and foster her children." "Both men and women have *one* lead role, that as human beings," Moberg declared.<sup>86</sup> While there was some resurgence in pro-natalist discourse, as birth rates declined again in the early 1960s, the new emphasis on gender equality meant that any policy response would have to hold men and women equally responsible for family formation.<sup>87</sup>

With these shifts in public discourse at their back, Swedish activists advanced their gender equality agenda through multiple political channels. These efforts were informally coordinated by Group 222, a loose but highly influential network of journalists, politicians, trade unionists, bureaucrats, and social scientists who met monthly at the home of the labor union activist Anika Baude.<sup>88</sup> Group 222 was both an incubator for policy ideas, such as increased childcare, gender-neutral insurance policies, and individual taxation, as well as a mechanism for disseminating those ideas through the media and party elites (Olaf Palme, who became Prime Minister in 1969, attended many of the discussions).<sup>89</sup> Before generating the major policy shifts

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<sup>85</sup> This view was most famously expressed in Alva Myrdal and Viola Klein's book *Women's Two Roles*. Alva Myrdal and Viola Klein, *Women's Two Roles: Home and Work* (London: Routledge, 2008 [1956]).

<sup>86</sup> Quoted in Lundqvist, *Family Policy Paradoxes: Gender Equality and Labor Market Regulation 1930-2010*, 61., emphasis in original

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>88</sup> Rianne Mahon, "Child Care in Canada and Sweden: Policy and Politics," *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society* 4, no. 3 (1997): 409.

<sup>89</sup> Christina Florin and Bengt Nilsson, "'Something in the Nature of a Bloodless Revolution...': How Gender Relations Became Gender Equality Policy in Sweden in the Nineteen-Sixties and Seventies," in *State Policy and Gender System in the Two German States and Sweden 1945-1989*,

of the late 1960s and 1970s, detailed more below, these activities already generated new policy orientations within important state institutions, especially the labor market board (AMS). The AMS had already, in the 1950s, began considering the barriers to female participation in the workforce, such as lack of training and information, and in 1961 it began a range of activities focused on female workers, including education initiatives as well as direct incentives such as grants and allocations for female vocational training.<sup>90</sup> And prominent activists within the AMS worked to legitimate gender equality as a goal for labor market policy, often against the resistance of leaders within the LO.

Finally, towards the end of the 1960s and into the 1970s, the aspiration to gender equality was concretely, if partially, materialized in state policy-making. In 1969, the SAP adopted a report from a committee, chaired by Alva Myrdal, that positioned equality, including gender equality, as overarching goal of the party.<sup>91</sup> By 1972, Olaf Palme, then Prime Minister, would dedicate his entire speech at the SAP conference on gender equality.<sup>92</sup> For the formation of new welfare institutions, the three most significant results of this commitment to gender equality were individual taxation, a shift from maternity support to family leave, and the expansion of public childcare—all of which were expected to, and succeeded in, cementing women’s labor market attachment.<sup>93</sup> With perhaps the most far-reaching effects, mandatory individual taxation was passed into law in 1981(individual tax filing was optional beginning in 1969). Given the steep

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ed. Rolf Torstendahl, *Opuscula Historica Upsaliensia* (Uppsala: Distribution, Dept. of History, Uppsala Universitet, 1999), 45.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>91</sup> Translated into English as *Towards Equality: The Alva Myrdal Report to the Swedish Social Democratic Party*, trans. Roger Lind (Stockholm: Bokförlaget Prisma, 1971).

<sup>92</sup> ""Something in the Nature of a Bloodless Revolution...": How Gender Relations Became Gender Equality Policy in Sweden in the Nineteen-Sixties and Seventies," 14.

<sup>93</sup> The gender equality radicalization of the 1960s also lead to changes in the regulation of sexuality, although this was a slower process—abortion was only legalized in 1975.

progressivity of the Swedish tax system, individual rather than joint taxation of family income significantly reduced the effective marginal tax-rate for married women's earnings. In 1974, the Riksdag passed the law replacing maternity insurance with gender-neutral parental leave, which allowed for seven months leave and combined a basic level with 90% income replacement.<sup>94</sup> Finally, the Swedish state took up a massive project of building and funding public childcare provision. The decision to focus on public daycare represented a victory for the LO and the SAP vision of gender equality, which assumed women would work, as against the earlier view of the Liberal party and liberal intellectuals like Moberg, who called for a child bonus system. These lines became blurred, however, as the Liberal party came to accept some form of public childcare, while the Conservative Party, which initially even opposed a child bonus, came to argue on its behalf as an alternative to state childcare.<sup>95</sup> In any case, the support for municipal public childcare lead to a large increase in the availability of spaces—from 18,000 in 1965 to 125,000 in 1975.<sup>96</sup> By 1979, 29% of young children were enrolled in public childcare, and parties across the political spectrum remained committed to expanding the number slots.<sup>97</sup>

What were the effects of this second breakthrough for family policy and gender equality in Sweden? In principle, the reforms enshrined a principle of dual-breadwinner/dual-caregiver model into the logic of Swedish family policy, one in which men and women would equally distribute both paid work and caregiving.<sup>98</sup> And women did enter the workforce in large

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<sup>94</sup> Lundqvist, *Family Policy Paradoxes: Gender Equality and Labor Market Regulation 1930-2010*, 73.

<sup>95</sup> Mahon, "Child Care in Canada and Sweden: Policy and Politics," 389.

<sup>96</sup> Hinnfors, "Stability through Change: Swedish Parties and Family Policies, 1960-1980," 105.

<sup>97</sup> Lewis and Åström, "Equality, Difference, and State Welfare: Labor Market and Family Policies in Sweden," 68.

<sup>98</sup> Fraser calls this the universal breadwinner model, supported through state provision of care. Fraser, "After the Family Wage: A Postindustrial Thought Experiment," 51-55.

numbers, with participation in the labor force rising to 59% in 1970 and 74% by 1980.<sup>99</sup> At the same time, these changes were far from achieving Fraser's "universal caregiver" model, one that would transform the gendered connotations of work and care. During the 1970s and into the 1980s, more radical feminist groups such as Group 8 challenged the continued gendered connotations of care, and women in the SSKF pushed for changes that would ensure a more equal distribution of care-work, including a six-hour workday and a "daddy quota" in parental leave.<sup>100</sup> Indeed, the forms of female workforce participation that the reforms encouraged remained unequal, with women working an average of 24 hours per week (in 1982-83) versus 41 hours for men. Furthermore, women took the vast majority of parental leave and maintained their role as the primary caregiver.

Such figures point to the partial success of the 1960s/1970s reforms, and they imply a linear view of Sweden's social policy development, one in which the task would just have been for policy-makers to have gone further in, say, developing a family leave policy or trying to break down gender norms.<sup>101</sup> Yet there were deeper contradictions built into the gender equality strategy Swedish policy actors pursued. And these contradictions are born, in part, of the political compromise behind these reforms: women were to gain the same status as men, but only through employment growth that would not affect the inherited privileges of male workers. Gender inequality was implicitly framed as a matter of unequal opportunities rather than of

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<sup>99</sup> Jenson and Rianne, "Representing Solidarity: Class, Gender and the Crisis in Social-Democratic Sweden," 91.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 89-91; Karlsson, "Social Democratic Women's Coup in the Swedish Parliament.", Sejersted, *The Age of Social Democracy: Norway and Sweden in the Twentieth-Century*, 451-52.

<sup>101</sup> This view is implicitly advanced in Olson's use of Sweden for thinking about a reflexive and participatory welfare state. In his view, the positive effects of Sweden's care policies are undermined by residual "structural barriers, cultural norms, and economic disincentives" which together "undermine some of the progressive effects of family leave policy." Olson, *Reflexive Democracy: Political Equality and the Welfare State*, 70.

structures that enabled and reproduced male domination. As Orloff notes in her critique of efforts to use the Scandinavian welfare states as a model for women's continued emancipation, these reforms do little in the way of addressing "men's attachment to the powers and privileges of masculinity."<sup>102</sup> And these more direct confrontations of male privilege could be suppressed by assuming the continued success of Sweden's full-employment policy, which would enable the labor market to absorb the influx of female workers.

However, the entry of the women into the labor force did not follow this path. Indeed, women began to work just as the Rehn-Meidner model was coming under serious strain. Demand for workers in industrial jobs ended up being lower than expected. Instead, women largely entered the public sector, and the expansion of the welfare state—including of services to enable women to work—ended up becoming the main driver of female employment. Sweden today continues to have one of the most highly gender-segregated labor markets, although the ongoing shift to a post-industrial economic regime has enabled efforts towards de-segregation.<sup>103</sup> Nonetheless, through the 1970s and 1980s women were primarily employed in the public sector. Thus, during the 1980s, 80% of new jobs were created in the public sector, and 75% of these new jobs went to female workers.<sup>104</sup> Public sector employment as a percentage of total employment increased from 12.8% in 1960 to 30% in 1980.<sup>105</sup> And this public sector expansion, predictably, produced a large increase of both the Swedish budget and the overall Swedish tax

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<sup>102</sup> Orloff, "Should Feminists Aim for Gender Symmetry?: Why the Dual-Earner/Dual-Carer Model May Not Be Every Feminist's Utopia," 138.

<sup>103</sup> Anne Lise Ellingsaeter, "Scandinavian Transformations: Labour Markets, Politics and Gender Divisions," *Economic and Industrial Democracy* 21, no. 3 (2000); Mandel and Semyonov, "A Welfare State Paradox: State Interventions and Women's Employment Opportunities in 22 Countries.;" Numhauser-Henning, "The Policy in Gender Equality in Sweden."

<sup>104</sup> Kimberly Earles, "The Gendered Effects of the Reregulation of the Swedish Welfare State," *Socialism and Democracy* 18, no. 1 (2004): 113.

<sup>105</sup> Sven Steinmo, "Globalization and Taxation: Challenges to the Swedish Welfare State," *Comparative Political Studies* 35, no. 7 (2002): 845.

burden, which by 1990 was absorbing 60% of GDP.<sup>106</sup> Rather than de-gendering employment and care, the state, which took over care responsibilities, was itself feminized, both in terms of the gender of its employees and in the eye of public discourse, where suppressed gender conflict was playing itself out as inter-worker conflicts between the public and the private sectors.

Between 1983 and 1991, Swedish social democracy entered a period of crisis. In 1983, the Swedish employers association (SAF) unilaterally withdrew from tri-partite peak-level wage negotiations, marking the end of Swedish corporatism. In 1991, the SAP was defeated in the wake of the economic crash of 1989, when a bursting real-estate bubble forced the government to bail out several banks. A bourgeois coalition came to power on a promise of welfare state restructuring and crisis management and immediately faced a jump in unemployment from 2% in 1991 to 10% in 1993. The budget deficit soared to 13% of GDP, and it was left to the SAP, which returned to office in 1995, to implement austerity measures.<sup>107</sup> The relative importance of the various causes of the crisis of Swedish social democracy remain subject to debate, but the overall dominant view is that this was an economic crisis born of imbalances within the Swedish growth strategy. And while certainly the crisis was bound up with underlying shifts in the structure of Swedish production systems, the preceding analysis implies that this crisis had an irreducible gender dimension and was driven, in part, by the displacement of gender conflicts onto the state through public sector expansion. Thus, while it is true that, in the 1970s and 1980s, Swedish firms faced increasing international competition, that they were shifting away from Fordist production towards more knowledge-intensive industries such as services and engineering, and that this increasingly required investing abroad rather than domestically and the formation of multi-national corporations, the Swedish state's ability to respond to these shifts so

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 846.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 852.

as to sustain solidaristic social policies was hampered by the fiscal imbalances produced by the gender equality strategy begun in the 1970s.<sup>108</sup> Instead, the Swedish economic and social policy regime went into crisis.

Schematically, the crisis of Social democracy had three interrelated components: under-investment, inflationary wage pressures, and fiscal expansion. In each case, the crisis tendencies were exacerbated by the suppressed gender conflicts outlined above. The Swedish economic approach was already under strain when women entered the labor market en masse, with growth slowing beginning in 1970—a reason women predominately entered the public sector. Slowing productivity growth made it harder to pursue the squeeze strategy, as there would be less growth in booming industries to absorb recently unemployed workers, and so the Swedish government increasingly began subsidizing struggling firms. Combined with increased wages, this meant that Swedish firms were relatively under-profitable and so were under-investing in productivity increases. And due to its transformative and democratizing political effects, the Rehn-Meidner solution to this dilemma—wage earner funds—did not come about until 1983, and only then in a watered-down form.<sup>109</sup> Yet, because of its increasing spending on public sector employment, the state also could not step in to help fill the savings shortfalls.<sup>110</sup> Swedish firms responded to this

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<sup>108</sup> On these changes, see Pontusson, "At the End of the Third Road: Swedish Social Democracy in Crisis.;" Gerhard Schnyder, "Like a Phoenix from the Ashes? Reassessing the Transformation of the Swedish Political Economy since the 1970s," *Journal of European Public Policy* 19, no. 8 (2012); Steinmo, "Globalization and Taxation: Challenges to the Swedish Welfare State."

<sup>109</sup> Jonas Pontusson, "Radicalization and Retreat in Swedish Social Democracy," *New Left Review* 165 (1987).

<sup>110</sup> Pontusson also speculates that Swedish firms moved towards a preference for equity funding rather than credit because of the increasing risk of research and development as opposed to Fordist productivity increases. "At the End of the Third Road: Swedish Social Democracy in Crisis," 324. This contrasts with the 2000's, when Swedish government spending on R&D was amongst the highest in the world. I think this is further evidence that the budgetary dilemmas born of public sector expansion constrained the state's ability to preserve the Rehn-Meidner

under-investment crisis by seeking to divide the labor movement as one avenue to restoring profitability. Solidaristic wage setting squeezed profits, but it also squeezed employees in more profitable sectors by keeping their wages artificially low.<sup>111</sup> And these divides were even more pronounced given the size of the public sector unions, for whom wage negotiations were less easily tied to productivity increases. Thus, employers sought to restore profitability in part by offering additional wage increases to higher-skilled workers, knowing that this would enable them to keep wages lower in other sectors. Because of both the state's budgetary constraints and increasing divisions within the labor movement, firms were able to restore profitability by destroying Sweden's solidaristic wage system.

The breakdown of solidaristic wage setting aggravated the two other crisis tendencies in the Swedish welfare state: inflationary pressures and budgetary expansion. Equal workforce participation was bought at the price of large-scale public sector expansion, which undermined the commitment to fiscal restraint, one of the necessary planks of the Rehn-Meidner model. Furthermore, the expansion of the public sector undermined the logic of solidaristic wage setting, as public sector wages were not subject to the international competition and so potential productivity gains that encouraged wage restraint. The breakdown of centralized wage setting generated inflationary wage-increases in several sectors, especially the public sector. And wage increases entered into a destructive cycle with the budgetary expansions produced, in part, by the

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model. Schnyder, "Like a Phoenix from the Ashes? Reassessing the Transformation of the Swedish Political Economy since the 1970s," 1135-37.

<sup>111</sup> Indeed, these tensions in the labor movement were evident earlier, expressed most dramatically in the wildcat miners strikes in 1969 (Kiruna strikes). These strikes were a reaction to the wage-constraints imposed on blue-collar workers relative to white-collar workers. On one interpretation, the radicalization of the SAP during the 1970s was an effort to respond to these underlying tensions in the labor movement, and so the failure of that radicalization in the face of determined employer resistance is part of what paved the way for the split of the labor movement in 1983. "Like a Phoenix from the Ashes? Reassessing the Transformation of the Swedish Political Economy since the 1970s," 1131-32.

size of Sweden's public sector. Inflation continuously pushed workers into higher tax brackets, and the budgetary demands meant that these additional tax revenues could not be redistributed back to workers. Workers came to discount tax increases in their wage demands, leading to even higher inflation as well as new budgetary pressures.<sup>112</sup>

The wage conflicts also lead to breakdown of the SAP's electoral coalition, as male workers increasingly supported the non-socialist parties (the Moderates and the New Democrats) in the early 1990s, while women remained loyal to the SAP—a reflection of the increasingly divergent interests between male and female employment sectors (the former seeking wage flexibility and the latter valuing wage solidarity). Rather than confront these pressures directly, the Swedish government responded with devaluation in 1982 and credit market deregulation. Both temporarily sustained purchasing power and firm profitability, yet they also contributed to the unusual size and scope of the economic crisis when it did arrive in 1989, which extended beyond a fiscal crisis to a banking collapse and a run on the krone. The bourgeois coalition elected in 1991 failed to fully bring the budgetary situation back under control, and so the SAP ended up being responsible for the re-orientation of the Swedish economic and social system towards what became known as a flexicurity approach, one that focused on knowledge-intensive industries and that shifted social policy towards “choice” as a means for controlling costs.

While it is not, of course, reducible to it, the crisis of Swedish democracy was in part a product of the contradictions of emancipation in the welfare state. Rather than confronting the proceeds of male domination directly, the Swedish strategy was to seek equality through labor market expansion and wage equality achieved via solidaristic wage-setting. Put differently, rather than directly expropriating men by dismantling their privileged location in society, this

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<sup>112</sup> Pontusson, "At the End of the Third Road: Swedish Social Democracy in Crisis," 315-18.

strategy sought to indirectly tax men by equalizing wages between male and female sectors of the economy, keeping private sector wages artificially low so as to enable high public sector wages. As an indirect strategy of conflict avoidance, one that did not produce any stronger forms of solidarity or collective political action, it proved unsustainable in the long run, eventually contributing to the crisis of solidaristic politics more generally

In sum, the crisis of the Swedish welfare state had a deep and particular gender dimension. And the underlying contradictions in the gender equality strategy pursued by the SAP and state feminists, which in turn had roots in the earlier logics of Swedish family policy. As Lundqvist argues, “the history of the Swedish family is...not one of linear progress from gender inequality to shared responsibilities under the auspices of the state, but rather one of false starts and contradictions between different and sometimes incompatible interests and goals.”<sup>113</sup> Beginning in the 1930s, Swedish family policy at once took up gender relations as potential objects of deliberate collective action and judgment and instrumentalized the family to the broader imperatives of economic reproduction. “Women’s issues” were simultaneously universalized in two contradictory ways: first, as an issue of domination and justice, and second, as an issue of economic growth and competitiveness through population growth. In practice, the formation of institutions that advanced gender emancipation were inseparable from the instrumental matter of managing the population, a viewpoint which lead intellectuals like the Myrdals to position family relationships as technical concerns to be engineered through social policy. Politicizing gender relations through such instrumental frames also enabled Swedish policy actors to pursue equality policies without directly confronting male privilege and hegemony. Indeed, Swedish policy placed minimal demands, and when it has, it has focused

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<sup>113</sup> Lundqvist, *Family Policy Paradoxes: Gender Equality and Labor Market Regulation 1930-2010*, 129.

mostly on equalizing caregiving rather than dismantling male power structures in the state and the workplace.<sup>114</sup> The equality strategy begun in 1960 exemplifies this effort to achieve parity while minimizing direct challenges to domination itself.

And yet, even as Swedish family policy was bound up with both integrative and disciplinary mechanisms as well as the broader imperatives of Swedish economic structures, feminist activists within the state were able to use welfare institutions as mechanisms for unearthing and challenging structures of domination. Welfare institutions provided a language and a set of institutional frameworks for making public how male domination enabled the exploitation of female work. The struggle of Swedish feminism has been to compel democratic institutions to confront those exploitative structures with the same force as they have confronted exploitative relationships between workers and capital. Unfortunately, the history of Swedish family policy reveals that male workers were often willing to side with employers to preserve the material gains of male hegemony, as evinced in the breakdown of solidaristic wage bargaining. To put it in terms of Habermas's dialectic of moral life, men, rather than acknowledging their status as the exploiter (criminal) and so viewing the indirect taxation as a reflection of their suppressed common life context, chose to view it as a form of external causality that could be evaded by breaking solidarity. Nonetheless, the process of female emancipation is still ongoing, with welfare institutions necessary and unavoidable, if ambiguous, instruments for challenging the structures of domination that support and reproduce patriarchy.

### Conclusion

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<sup>114</sup> From the 1980s to the present, however, Swedish activists have been increasingly concerned with issues of political representation in leadership roles, including agitating for representation quotas in both the public and the private sector.

The modern welfare state has had a powerful impact on family structures and gender relations. Yet how have the welfare institutions that took shape beginning in the late nineteenth century altered the structures of domination that support male privilege? The preceding has argued that struggles over such institutions can be fruitfully thought of in terms of the causality of fate and the dialectic of morality. Butler and Fraser both provide resources for expanding Habermas's conception of domination to contemporary struggles in the welfare state. Butler's analysis of the melancholic structure of gender norms reveals the constitutive foreclosures through social structures constitute gendered subjects. Domination, in this view, always depends on our attachment to subjugation through foreclosure, and challenges to domination operate through the public avowal of the suppressed needs. Yet such avowals will always be partial, as subjects and the structures that partially constitute them will never become fully self-transparent—a point on which Habermas and Butler concur. Such partial avowal was evident in the Swedish case: the thematization of gender domination as an object of public concern was always mediated by non-emancipatory concerns that averted a full challenge to male domination, such as Sweden's national interest in population growth. Yet, as I argued, Butler herself fails to adequately articulate these dynamics because of how she construes the relationship between subjects and the social—she does not account for the worldly mediation of structures of domination, such that her thought tends to oppose the isolated subject to the totality of social structures that constitute it. Fraser brings into focus these institutional mediations and compels us to think about the conditions under which welfare institutions will further projects to undermine male privilege. In particular, her focus on the public contestation over needs as a form of political agency that does not fit neatly into Habermas's system/lifeworld model sensitizes us to how welfare institutions can function to open up spaces of public contestation over both the

content of need-claims and how the current contours of need-definition are structured by hegemonic norms that arise from structures of domination.

Yet the history of struggles over welfare institutions belies Fraser's implicit reduction of institutions to managerial mechanisms for fixing need definition. Rather, in my view, these struggles have reflected historically concrete enactments of the sort of logic Habermas captures in his analysis of the causality of fate. In the Swedish case, challenges to male domination were mediated by a family policy regime that followed contradictory imperatives—at once trying to equalize the conditions of women and contribute to the reproduction of Swedish capitalism. Indeed, these welfare institutions ended up becoming a mechanism for partially redistributing the disproportionate benefits of male hegemony, thereby furthering discursive challenges to the naturalness of gender structures, while at the same time avoiding more direct, transformative challenges to the established gender order in Sweden. The eventual crisis of the Swedish social democratic model was generated, in part, by the simultaneous acknowledgement and suppression of these normative claims. Seeking equality through public sector expansion, the causality of fate exercised its power through the implicit appropriation and redistribution of earnings from male-dominated to female-dominated economic sectors. Solidarity depends on relative dominant groups recognizing that their earnings are the product of domination, which enables those positioned as male to benefit from the unpaid or underpaid carework of those positioned as women—in other words, it depends on whether they will come to recognize the dialectic of moral life implicit in the causality of fate to which they are subject. Either way, the history of social institutions embody the repetition of such dialectics of moral life, the sedimentation of past struggles, positioned between the instrumental imperatives of the reproduction of capital and the state and the emancipatory demand for a society without domination.

## **Conclusion: Democratic Theory and the Future of the Welfare State**

Democratic political action invariably occurs under conditions not of the actors' own making. Moreover, in contemporary societies, subordinated groups seeking more democratic forms of political life face both entrenched structures of domination as well as trans-national economic forces that threaten to thwart their projects. This is especially the case for democratic projects that occur within and engage with the structures of the modern welfare state. A persistent anxiety animating contemporary views of democracy and the welfare state is precisely that such engagement will presuppose and reproduce broader structures of domination—that social welfare politics represents the substitution of potentially transformative political claims with economic interests that admit of technical management. Thus, from this perspective, measures such as unemployment insurance, health insurance, and pensions, all of which arose alongside highly regulated and ritualized collective bargaining, represent efforts to co-opt the leadership of the workers' movement, while the institutions grouped under family policy function to ameliorate the relative condition of women while generally leaving intact the gendered division of labor and the domination it entails. Indeed, such anxieties coincide with the initial emergence of the welfare state itself, insofar as Bismarck's welfare measures were explicitly targeted at the growing German workers' movement—the movement that became the social-ideological carrier for Germany's thwarted democratization. The participants in the revisionism debate were already grappling with the implications of this fact, albeit within a theoretical framework in which direct democratic participation and the contingencies of collective political action often held a tenuous location.

A viable vision of a more democratic and participatory welfare state must theoretically contend with the persistence of these anti-democratic structures and forces while nonetheless

revealing the traces of historical possibilities that outrun the contingent compromises that constitute contemporary welfare institutions. The foregoing account has been an effort to both discern these traces and situate them within a broader theoretical account of their significance for democratic politics in capitalist societies. And, furthermore, it has been an attempt to understand why so many current theories of collective democratic agency are unable to identify and develop these possibilities. At the broadest level, I have argued that Max Weber's thought, developed as an effort to contain and steer Germany's democratization so as to preserve elite rule, continues to structure the underlying conceptions of institutional form and political agency that determine contemporary accounts of the welfare state. In particular, Weber's socio-theoretic analysis reduces welfare institutions to instrumental mechanisms for the technical management of social risks and economic processes. As I argued in Chapter 1, Weber's rejection of more expansive conceptions of democratic self-governance is grounded in analysis of the relationship between the everyday and structures of domination. And, moreover, it is produced by his reduction of the everyday to instrumental calculation and his related view that the meaningful worldviews that could, for instance, ground democratic aspirations arise only through charismatic ruptures with the everyday. The reduction of the everyday to instrumentality forms the backdrop for ostensibly opposed visions of the relationship between democratic agency and welfare institutions. To be sure, Weber's thought exercises an abiding influence in contemporary democratic theory because it so powerfully captures political experiences that are today familiar: navigating expansive bureaucratic agencies, adjusting our lives to the rationalizing demands of the economy, observing political decision-making from a far remove. Yet, for Weber, these mundane experiences reflect the deeper socio-theoretic reality that, since all social and political institutions

are determined by everyday, calculable needs, they must presuppose and reproduce relations of domination.

In place of this view, I have sought to develop an account of welfare institutions as worldly mediators, mediators that, while always bound up with economic imperatives, also serve to transform bare material needs into the possible objects of collective judgment and political action. To do so requires a more theoretical confrontation with the notion of value underlying Weber's analysis. Weber's view of modern political life is deeply interwoven with his understanding of personality and value—conceptions that arise from the Southwestern school of neo-Kantianism represented most prominently by Heinrich Rickert. And these efforts to reformulate the basis of the cultural sciences in terms of the concept of value also provide the backdrop for Heidegger's early thinking. Thus, as I reconstructed it in Chapter 3, Heidegger's immanent critique of the philosophy of value provides a powerful avenue for thematizing and overcoming the assumptions that drive Weber's view of the political world. Yet, as Heidegger is still committed to a certain vision of philosophy, he remains in the orbit of the reduction of the everyday to instrumentality, albeit in sophisticated linguistic terms. Arendt's thought, the focus of Chapter 4, pursues some of the avenues opened up by Heidegger's phenomenology of worldliness even as it produces a decisive critique of his rejection of the everyday. Our interpretive access to these aspects of Arendt's thought has been blocked by the assumption that she shares the critique of the everyday in terms of instrumentality and so is concerned to preserve a sphere of non-instrumental political praxis from the means-ends reasoning characteristic of work and labor. On the contrary, in my reading, Arendt provides a compelling view of the everyday in terms of worldliness and, relatedly, an account of the worldly mediations between economic activities and public life. And this perspective enables us to analyze capitalist social

relationships, not as another permutation of the instrumental satisfaction of needs, but as representing the loss of the worldly mediations of the economic. Finally, then, Arendt's development of the idea of worldliness provides a view for analyzing the work welfare institutions do, not just to satisfy material needs, but also to constitute spaces of political appearance and judgment.

This perspective, furthermore, can inform an analysis of the dynamics through which welfare institutions simultaneously sustain relationships of domination and open up those relationships to critique and potential transformation. To provide a theoretical account of these dynamics, Chapter 4 turns to Habermas's thought, and especially his early critique of domination in terms of the causality of fate. While for Weber domination—the rule of man over man—is an inevitable feature of all human societies, Habermas's early thought is centrally concerned with redeeming our capacity to subject entrenched relationships of domination to critical scrutiny and political challenge. And Habermas's effort, as arising from a negative, non-metaphysical view of critical reason, both responds to and overcomes Weber's skeptical interpretation of his contemporary democratic movements as late modern remnants of natural law. Recall that Weber advances his skeptical view of democracy by tracing all value back to charismatic ruptures with the everyday. From this perspective, claims against domination always presuppose a reference to some transcending value-order, even if, ultimately, that order rests on a subjective choice. Habermas presents a much more modest and deflationary—although for that reason no less radical—view of the basis for critical claims against relationships of domination. As I reconstruct it, Habermas's critique of domination rests, not on some strong set of commitments about the inherent structure of language, but rather on an analysis of how relationships of domination contradict the shared life-context of both the dominated and the dominator—what Habermas

thinks through in terms of the criminal. And while this shared life context is, to some degree, taken by Habermas as given in the structure of our everyday practices, Habermas does not point to it as an ontological guarantee, one standing outside of the space of political contestation. Rather, as with the critical insights of psychoanalysis, the claims of the subjugated are only validated retrospectively through their transformed practices. At the same time, Habermas comes to abandon this early critique of domination as a form of systematically distorted communication. I argue that this shift is driven by his sociological analysis of the rationalization of domination in late capitalist society and not by internal incoherencies in his earlier philosophical view. Indeed, critics of his early thought for lacking philosophical foundations seek precisely the sort of objective grounding for critiques of domination that Weber and Habermas think is impossible in our post-metaphysical age. Once the sociological assumptions driving Habermas's abandonment of his early critique of domination are brought to light, his theoretical framework can be redeployed in a way that accounts for the simultaneous persistence of direct, structural, and abstract mediations of domination.

Together, the theoretical vantage of Arendt and Habermas leads to a view of welfare institutions as worldly mediators, at once implicated in structures of domination and exposing those structures to critical challenge, with implications for theorizing the possibility for transformative democratic action within welfare capitalist societies. They provide responses to the twin, interwoven pillars of Weber's account of modern democratic life—his reduction of the everyday to instrumentality and of institutional forms to domination. And their theoretical view, I contend, better captures the political experiences of grassroots political movements engaging with welfare state institutions. While, from Weber's perspective, the participation of German workers in welfare institutions appears only as cooptation and integration, the working-class

vision of the social, as I reconstructed it in Chapter 2, positions mass mobilization and workers' direct participation in welfare institutions as a central component of social reform efforts.

Weberian hopes for the stabilizing integration of workers through the welfare state rest on the implicit assumption that welfare matters, as objects of specialized, technical judgment, will inevitably foster elite leadership amongst workers. To the contrary, workers insisted, along the lines of Arendt's analysis of worldliness, on the irreducibly political dimension of judgments within welfare institutions—an irreducibility that demanded the direct presence of workers within administrative structures like the health insurance boards. Indeed, the Weberian approach requires taking up an objectivizing, third person perspective on such claims and reducing them to supposedly more fundamental and real material interests, a move also characteristic of the comparative political economy of the welfare state. For the tradition of German social liberalism, this external perspective authorized the view that the democratic demands of the workers' movement could be overcome by transforming political claims into economic interests to be managed through hierarchical state institutions. Arendt's phenomenology of the worldly aspect of economic phenomenon like interests, however, enables us to see how such dualism, which implicitly associates the economic with the objective and predictable and political judgment with the subjective and the arbitrary, is a product of the loss of the worldly mediations of economic imperatives. Thus, when workers insisted on participating in welfare institutions, they were pointing to this potentially worldly aspect of material needs, as well as to the role welfare institutions could play in opening such needs up to political, rather than just instrumental and technical, judgments.

Similarly, as I argued in Chapter 6, Habermas's account of dialectic of morality illuminates the dynamics through which Swedish feminists challenged relationships of

domination in the welfare state. The Swedish welfare state, often seen as a leader for overcoming gender inequality, also provides a clear instance of the political processes through which welfare institutions at once sustain structures of domination and expose them to critical challenge. On the one hand, the development of family policy turned the family into a potential object of political practice and partially universalized claims for gender equality by linking them to broader political concerns. Yet, at the same time, welfare institutions functioned to reproduce the normative family structure within Swedish society. The logic of family policy constrained the emancipatory force of claims to gender equality, producing political pressures to reframe such claims in terms of the interests of the Swedish nation. Moreover, the formation of family policy was deeply intertwined with the Swedish labor market and the structural imperatives of global capital. From a Weberian perspective, this fact would reveal that the logic of the social tends to incorporate claims to democratic participation and emancipation within an instrumental logic of use that reproduces some form of domination. Yet, in my view, the interweaving of emancipatory claims and instrumental imperatives produces a dialectic of morality, one in which the suppressed emancipatory claims return through the causality of fate. Weber's social ontology, in which normative claims always arise from the extraordinary, is unable to account for the possibility that structures of domination may open themselves up to critical challenge through the dialectic of morality. Rather, for him, challenges to domination are strictly external, made with reference to a transcendental order. And for many of Habermas's erstwhile followers, his achievement has been to produce precisely a new, post-metaphysical basis for such transcendental claims. The political traction of Swedish feminists acting within the welfare state resides, however, in how claims to emancipation gained force through their interaction with instrumental economic imperatives while also producing institutional objects and political

potentials that outran those same forces. Sweden's equality project, still incomplete, provides a particularly compelling illustration of how democratic action within the welfare state exposes structures of domination to potential social transformation.

Beyond these particular histories and theoretical figures, my argument has sought to reconsider some of the basic terms through which political theorists analyze democratic politics in contemporary societies marked by capitalist and bureaucratic political structures. I have been concerned, in particular, to critically scrutinize the assumptions that lead theorists to separate the political from the economic, advancing visions of democratic agency that are divorced from, even opposed to, a critical theory of political economy. Theorists of the autonomy of the political and of agonistic democratic agency tend to position the instrumentality of the economic as a threat to creative political action. They seek to theorize such political action as extraordinary moments of rupture that occur outside of the calculable routines of ordinary institutional forms. One aspiration of my argument, then, has been to restore to our analysis of democratic possibilities an account of the relationship between democratic agency and economic structures without returning to the economic reductionism characteristic of some versions of Marxism. Towards this end, the foregoing chapters have together sought to rethink a constellation of concepts—value, instrumentality, and domination—that are of central importance for both diagnosing the limitations of contemporary democratic theory and for transcending those limits. Indeed, my claim is that the contours of contemporary democratic theory are powerful influenced by a certain picture of how these concepts relate to each other, one that produces a particular understanding of the relationship between democratic agency and the welfare state. And I hope

that my efforts to unearth and scrutinize these assumptions will have ramifications for thinking about issues in political contexts beyond my explicit focus of the welfare state.

The notion of value is a central concern for thinking about both economic and political activities. Economics, both in its classical and neo-classical forms, could be broadly understood as a science of value. For classical economists, the central question was the true source of economic value. The potential disconnect between value and prices opened up a space for the working-class claim to exploitation, which turned the doctrines of the classical economists—that productive labor rather than unproductive feudal rents was the true source of value—against the bourgeois. Even in reconstructions of Marx that seek to avoid grounding the critique of capitalism in a trans-historical theory of labor as the constitutive social activity, the concept of value is meant to lead into the hidden secrets of the capitalist mode of production—the structure of the commodity form is such that it presupposes that value is produced through a measure of labor-time even as it obscures this fact by making value appear as the product of prices. And lurking in the background of even these sophisticated reconstructions of Marx's critique of capitalism is a notion of the objective accumulation of wealth (which represents humanity's self-externalization in the material world) that renders the value-form progressively obsolete.<sup>1</sup> Put differently, within the horizon of classical political economy, with its implicit ideology of productivity and growth, value itself did not appear as a problem, nor did the economic appear as a domain of potentially meaningless means-ends calculations.

One goal of marginalist theory was to sever an analysis of the economy from any sort of implied objective or quasi-natural order. The effort to base a critique of capitalism on the disconnect between value and wealth ignores the irreducibly normative aspect of a concept like

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<sup>1</sup> For this view, see Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory*, especially 324-49.

productivity, which calls forth judgments about the ends increased productivity is meant to serve. Economists no longer searched for the underlying source of value but rather viewed price as a revealed value, one that reflected individuals' trade-offs in pursuit of what they valued. From this perspective, scarcity is an inevitable fact under conditions where individuals pursue distinctive ends or values, such that social mechanisms for managing these trade-offs will always be necessary. Value as expressed in a mechanism like price is simple a measure of these relative subjective evaluations. And any effort to go beyond these objectifications of value via a normative notion like wealth or merit will involve an impossible effort to penetrate into the domain of individuals' subjective motivations and desires.<sup>2</sup>

Weber's account of values continues this effort to defang the critique of capitalism by divorcing the political from the economic. Value pluralism in politics is the equivalent of marginalism in economics. And more so than his marginalist contemporaries, Weber situates the effort to reformulate economics as a science of means-ends calculations within a broader account of the non-instrumental structure of value. The socialist demands to politicize and democratize the economic sphere only evinces their lack of historical awareness of the origins of their own ultimate values in earlier charismatic ruptures with the everyday. All political doctrines rest on some implicit account of ultimate value, meaning, and salvation. These ultimate values stand against the field of instrumental means-ends calculations characteristic of ordinary economic and political institutions. Even if we do not always make values explicit to ourselves, the social is

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<sup>2</sup> See F. A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 148-66. Indeed, in this regard Hayek goes less far than Weber, insofar as he thinks that the fact that price mechanism leads to economic growth is itself a universal normative justification for market liberty. Weber would push him to recognize that economic growth is a good only in relationship to some value or set of values.

constituted by instrumental routines that, when examined, implicitly refer to some set of non-instrumental values as their ultimate ends.

And this view rests on a certain understanding of what value itself consists of and how values provide our activities with meaning. Within this view, a value is an ultimate end, an end-in-itself, something which is not defined with reference to anything else. Value, in many respects, becomes a substitute for God—the unconditioned mover that gets everything going, the final ratio that provides a measure for whether our particular activities live up to our ends—thus Weber’s use of the metaphor of polytheism to define his post-Christian era of value pluralism.<sup>3</sup> Yet, at the same time, values are a matter of subjective choice, as otherwise it would be unclear why values would be internal to and so definitive of our practices, rather than objective facts about the world that we must confront and negotiate. As a result, philosophical perspectives that deploy the concept of value tend to oscillate curiously between subjectivist and objectivist perspectives, at once recognizing that values are, on a certain level, arbitrary and subjective, while also inciting a search for the grounds that will ensure that values can stand against us as a measure of our activities. And, notably, theorists who begin from this conception of value all tend, in various ways, to try to take up a quasi-theological, God-like, objective perspective on the political, even as they break with the implicit theology and eschatology of the philosophy of history.

The philosophy of value repudiated the notion of historical development and praxis that undergirded the objectivity of the philosophy of history without thereby relinquishing the quest for an objective perspective itself. To be sure, many variants of the philosophy of history

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<sup>3</sup> Arendt implicitly draws out this point with her use of Plato’s critique of making because god must be the ultimate measure, at Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 174.

repudiated this aspiration to view history directly from a God-like perspective.<sup>4</sup> As Habermas's observes in his brilliant reconstruction of the traditional critique of capitalism, Marx, via Hegel, adopts the gnostic idea of a God who has become "external to himself...by going into exile within Himself...and, in the highest intensification of Himself, becoming His other: nature..."<sup>5</sup> For Hegel, this idea of "God's unreserved surrender to history renders the crisis complex [of history] perfect as a totality," even as Hegel "spoils the point" he took from the original myth because, in Hegel's philosophy of history, God "still knows that He anticipated everything from the beginning, and even *in* history still retained His mastery *over* history."<sup>6</sup> Marx, to an extent, restores the original impulse behind the myth by taking seriously its atheistic implications: if God has truly become historical, then "mankind is left alone to itself and with its work of salvation."<sup>7</sup> The self-alienation of God in history is now replaced by the self-alienation of humans who, through social labor, "make themselves the authors of their own historical development, without however recognizing themselves as the subjects of that development."<sup>8</sup> Thus, the objectivity of the Marxian critique was guaranteed by discerning the traces, albeit negatively, of humanity's self-formation through its externalization in social labor.

Weber's neo-Kantian conception of the relationship between values and social knowledge, of course, was predicated on the idea that this sort of knowledge of the whole was impossible, as all knowledge was relative to an order of values. Nonetheless, values substitute for world-spirit in guaranteeing the objectivity of one's perspective. Thus, even as Weber

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<sup>4</sup> Koselleck, on the contrary, argues that the philosophy of history primarily consists of the desire to view history from the perspective of God's final judgment. Reinhart Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis: Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), especially 133, 73 n. 46.

<sup>5</sup> Habermas, "Between Science and Philosophy: Marxism as Critique," 215.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 216, emphasis in original.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 219.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 218.

repudiates the idea of the social critic as interpreting the immanent self-formation of humanity in history, he nonetheless still holds onto a quasi-theological ideal of objectivity. This is evident in Weber's vocation lectures, where he abrogates to himself the role of the prophetic critic, interpreting Germany's defeat as a sign of a broader intellectual, moral, and political failure. Indeed, the contradiction at the core of Weber's thought is that he seeks to overcome the metaphysics of Enlightenment thought by providing a relativizing account of the origins of value in charismatic experiences, and yet his own notion of objectivity depends on affirming values as the basis for one's constitution of the objects of social inquiry and analysis.

Thus, Weber's analysis sought to preserve the objectivity of social analysis, but at the cost of reducing the economic and political domain to instrumental, means-ends calculations, routines governed by implicit ultimate values that are the sediments of past charismatic ruptures with the everyday. Charismatic values replace the historical subject as the meaning-giving force in history. For Weber, it was sufficient to just articulate the existence of such competing values and so to dispel what he viewed as utopian political projects. In its American reception, Weber's perspective was formalized into the view that values constitute normative side-constraints that govern the terms of instrumental co-operation within the economy: the distinction between values and instrumentality was intellectually mapped onto the disciplinary divide between sociology and economics, and it was implicitly mapped onto a social ontology that distinguished between the instrumentality characteristic of ordinary politics and economics and the normativity characteristic of constitutional struggles and conflict over the ultimate, guiding values of society.<sup>9</sup> Subsequent liberal theorists of the welfare state such as Rawls, even as they hold out hope for constitutional meta-norms that could manage the conflict between various particular

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<sup>9</sup> This view is expressed in Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action*.

values, nonetheless concur with Weber about the instrumental structure of ordinary politics vis-à-vis these ultimate values and meta-values. In Rawls' view, we should view the political process "as a machine which makes social decisions" when various competing values are fed into it.<sup>10</sup> And Rawls shares Weber's desire to find an objective perspective on the political. To find a secure basis for these meta-values, Rawls enjoins us to view society "*sub specie aeternitatis*...to regard the human situation not only from all social but also from all temporal points of view."<sup>11</sup> From this perspective, any view of democratic agency or popular participation in the welfare state that goes beyond liberal constitutionalism would threaten to impose a particular conception of value—such as a neo-Aristotelian valorization of public participation—on others.<sup>12</sup> Thus, recent defenses of a more reflexive and participatory welfare state argue that democratic theory must take stock of this situate of value pluralism and devise theoretical defenses of a democratic welfare state that are "formal in the sense that Weber describes," by, for instance, developing a normative view of the obligations of the state "from the formal character of law" and its presupposition of political equality.<sup>13</sup>

In all, then, Weber's systematic account of the relationship between values and instrumentality reflects the breakdown of the traditional critique of capitalism even as it retains the desire for an objective perspective on the social, one that is taken up in subsequent idealized normative theorizing in political theory. Weber's conception of values as ends-in-themselves

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<sup>10</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice: Revised Edition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 172.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 514, emphasis in original.

<sup>12</sup> This is why, for example, Habermas has worked so hard to argue for the co-constitution of public and private liberty, albeit at the expense of theorizing possible modes of expansive political participation within the institutions he relegates to the economic and administrative subsystems. Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, 84-104, 341-87.

<sup>13</sup> Olson, *Reflexive Democracy: Political Equality and the Welfare State*, 15.

sustains his reduction of our familiar, everyday economic and political institutions to instrumental, means-ends calculations. And, finally, this leads him to reduce those institutions to domination—the inevitable rule of man over man—and in this, too, many strands of contemporary democratic theory follow him. Indeed, if for various liberal views of the welfare state, Weber produces the idea that values are no longer immanent to the historical development of the human species and so stand in need of post-metaphysical, rational legitimization, for radical critiques of the welfare state, Weber articulates the anxiety that the effort to ground transformative politics in a critique of political economy produced an inadequate account of the subtle instruments of domination. The intuition underlying this view is that instrumentality and domination are mutually supporting, and that this connection was obscured when the instrumental dimensions of social labor were simply viewed as part of the self-externalization of a collective subject, to be re-appropriated later through social and political struggle. This problem precedes the concern with economic reductionism, according to which the only “real” domination was that exercised by the bourgeois. Even if the framework of social labor could be expanded to include other dimensions of human activity and so other manifestations of domination, the question remains of whether its underlying conception of the relationship between culture and self-externalization is sufficient to diagnose what is wrong with domination and how our social practices sustain webs of instrumentalizing norms that reinforce structures of domination.

Thus, in this respect, Weber’s analysis of domination and rationalization undoubtedly contain core insights that have enabled and opened up a more subtle analysis of domination and the political challenges faced by movements attacking domination. Yet the appropriation of Weber’s insights carries a cost. Political theorists implicitly accept from Weber, first, that

ordinary political institutions are entirely determined by such means-ends calculations, and second, the idea that instrumental, means-ends calculations inherently reinforce an aspiration to mastery and domination, turning the subjects of social institutions into objects. Thus, for instance, many have observed the affinities between Foucault's analysis of disciplinary power, which operates at the capillary level by producing subjects as knowable within systems of power/knowledge, and Weber's account of rationalization. As Honneth puts it, "like Weber, Foucault traced the origin of modern disciplinary society back to a process of the historical convergence of techniques of rationalization that were suited to one another."<sup>14</sup> Similarly, as I argued earlier, sophisticated, discourse-based appropriations of Foucault, such as Butler's, implicitly accept the idea that our everyday social categories, as the product of an initial melancholic "turn" from the social into the psyche, consist of a network of calculable objects and fixed definitions. For these post-Weberian views, domination functions by rendering the flux of the social knowable and calculable, objects of institutional control and manipulation.

Put differently, these various accounts accept Weber's basic conceptual understanding of the relationship between non-instrumental values and the instrumental structures of the social, only inverting his normative valences. Collective values, rather than empowering the self through discipline or being the possible basis for the legitimation of social cooperation, are rather a component of "the rules and institutions that govern ordinary situations and constitute them as

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<sup>14</sup> Axel Honneth, *The Critique of Power: Reflective Stages in a Critical Social Theory*, trans. Kenneth Baynes (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), xxvii. Cf. Jean L. Cohen and Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 280. Critical commentaries have also pointed out the deep similarities between Foucault and Weber's conception of social action, as well as between Foucault and post-Weberian functionalism as represented by theorists like Parsons. Neil Brenner, "Foucault's New Functionalism," *Theory and Society* 23, no. 5 (1994); Honneth, *The Critique of Power: Reflective Stages in a Critical Social Theory*, 174-75.

ordinary” by suppressing “competing possibilities.”<sup>15</sup> And, within this implicit social ontology, theorists turn to contingency as the only possible basis for democratic agency that could unmask and challenge arbitrary relationships of domination. While democratic theorists have sought to move away from a pronounced focus on extraordinary moments of founding political action, they nonetheless continue to reproduce Weber’s give-and-take model of political agency, where democratic claims emerge over and against the calculable rationality of instituted political forms before eventually becoming absorbed into their routines. In Laclau and Mouffe’s landmark effort to recover political articulations and agency out from the positive and determinate notion of the social characteristic of Second International Marxism, the central task, in their view, was both to recognize the contingency of all social categories (“the non-complete character of all discursive fixation”) while nonetheless articulating social struggles that “partially fix meaning.”<sup>16</sup> Here contingency figures as both the condition of possibility of and a constant problem for radical-democratic politics. Similarly, for Honig, “all institutional settlements generate remainders”—remainders that can be the occasion for unruly democratic action which exceeds the terms of established value-systems.<sup>17</sup> In this vein, subsequent democratic theorists ground political agency in the “constitutive surplus” of the people vis-à-vis any particular institutional embodiment of their authority, a surplus that is “internal...[to] the order” founded on the people.<sup>18</sup> Or they figure inaugural democratic agency as acts of the radical imagination that “posit an object outside the use economy” of established institutions, only to have those new claims enter into the “domain

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<sup>15</sup> Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 213.

<sup>16</sup> Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 2001), 113.

<sup>17</sup> Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, 213; *Emergency Politics: Paradox, Law, Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 16, 125, 33.

<sup>18</sup> Jason Frank, *Constituent Moments: Enacting the People in Postrevolutionary America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 6, 31.

of instituted society” such that they “come to create the closure they once questioned.”<sup>19</sup> By presenting established institutions as scenes of calculation and technique, these efforts to rescue democratic agency in the contemporary world by turning to contingency nonetheless implicitly accept and reinforce Weber’s vision of the everyday as a domain of instrumentality that sustains and reproduces domination.

In all, then, an underlying way of relating values, instrumentality, and domination unites a variety of contemporary perspectives on the welfare state. Even as theorists disagree about the best way to characterize democratic agency, the possibility or desirability of legitimating communal meta-values, and how to describe the mechanisms of domination, they nonetheless share a set of underlying socio-theoretic commitments about the instrumentality of the economic realm and of ordinary, instituted politics. These commitments, inherited from Weber, reflect the breakdown of the traditional critique of political economy, even as they remain haunted by that critique’s desire for objectivity (a desire which incites its own unmasking). The breakdown of that perspective has, further, meant that democratic theories of the welfare state do not connect their analyses up with a critical account of the interweaving of the welfare state and the structures characteristic of modern capitalism. The critique of political economy gets reformulated as a critique of instrumental, means-ends rationalities, such that democratic agency needs to be protected from these structural economic imperatives. As such, post-Weberian analyses of democratic agency in capitalism are curiously denuded, unable to provide theoretical resources for considering how political struggles interface with the structural forces of a capitalist society.

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<sup>19</sup> Zerilli, *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom*, 62, 63.

My contention is that such an analysis is possible if we provide an account of the concepts of value, instrumentality, and domination emancipated from the tradition's desire to find an unconditioned perspective that transcends our involvement with the world. Following Heidegger and Arendt, I attempted to develop an analysis of these terms that begins, not with the subjective or the objective, seeking to derive one from the other, but with the worldly. And I have contended that this reconceptualization of value and instrumentality opens up an analysis of the relationship between domination and institutional forms that revives many of the democratic impulses of the critique of political economy while releasing them from the desire for grounding the objectivity of a critical perspective in the self-formation of humanity through social labor. Indeed, these modes of analysis are grounded differently from both the traditional critique of political economy and the Weberian and post-Weberian approaches to relating democracy and political economy. In particular, they are an effort to simultaneously call attention to the phenomenological structure of the practices we are already engaged in and to provide an account of how our received theoretical view of these practices—as exemplified, for instance, in Weber's notion of value—are parasitic upon, even as they obscure, those everyday experiences.

As I reconstructed it, the basic intuition underlying Heidegger and Arendt's critique of the concept of value is that our evaluative judgments, far from descending from some pre-existing set of cognitive values, are already given in our everyday, meaningful practices and comportments in the world. Furthermore, our judgments are always about some object or thing that brings us together with other actors, or else our judgments occur in the context of such objects. And it is the permanence of these objects—the embodiment of our worldly activities—that serves to give our judgments an objectivity or validity that stands against our subjective experiences. From the perspective of our involvement with the world, rather than that of

theoretical reflection, the value of an object, and even the “value” of the values we may hold as guides for our actions, consists only in how those objects or activities constitute spaces of judgment in common with others, spaces that, because they are interwoven with the built, material world, will outlive our action or actions. We just judge, and the validity of these judgments are normally given, not with reference to some transcending norms or values, but rather through their confirmation or disconfirmation by others. It requires a peculiar theoretical objectification of these activities to see our judgment of whether, for instance, a political action manifests the value of courage, as a judgment of value arising, in the last instance, from our answer to questions of ultimate meaning, such as the question of theodicy. If we are to remain within a this-worldly perspective, there are no final grounds for our judgments beyond how they enable and preserve the permanence of spaces of judgment. Value, in this analysis, is primordially—that is, before theoretical objectifications—a matter of these inter-subjective practices of judging and exposing our actions and the material outcomes of our works to the judgments of others. Only rarely, and in the context either of being thrown back upon our subjectivity in the absence of common spaces of appearance, or else of specific, de-personalizing and objectifying objects, such as scientific instruments, do we seek some sort of fully extra-subjective and extra-worldly ground for our judgments.<sup>20</sup>

My account of value, synthesizing aspects of Heidegger and Arendt’s thought, has the advantage of both calling our attention to the structure of the valuing activities in which we are already engaged as well as, importantly, showing how philosophies of value such as Weber’s are derivative of these ordinary experiences, even as they reflect a condition of world alienation in

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<sup>20</sup> On this idea, see Arendt’s discussion of the rise of the idea of the willing subject in post-Roman and Christian thought as well as her discussion of the world alienation that follows on the use of telescope. Arendt, "What Is Freedom?"; HC 248-89.

which we no longer perceive our pre-reflective judgments as reliable. And this analysis of value opens up a different angle, first, on the social-theoretic underpinnings of the concepts of instrumentality and domination, and second, on the possible structure of the critique of political economy and how such a critique could inform our analysis of the location of welfare institutions in capitalist societies. Against the backdrop of the above reconstruction of how the Weberian conception of value both reflects the breakdown of the traditional critique of capitalism and continues to structure democratic theory, I here synthesize the results of my more detailed analysis of these issues throughout the previous chapters. Then, finally, I want to move to examine the applicability of this analysis to certain aspects of our present historical conjuncture, when the material and political bases of the welfare state as it developed in the post-war period have weakened.

The Weberian picture of value, as we have seen, opposes value to the instrumentality of ordinary economic and political institutions—an instrumentality that also means that such institutions as inevitably orders of domination. Most of our ordinary activities, in this view, are characterized by means-ends calculations of expected benefit, calculations that are oriented, although typically only dimly, by the sedimentation of ultimate values in our received meanings and socially prescribed roles. The worldly view of values calls attention, in turn, to the worldly aspects of instrumentality—the fact that means-ends calculations always require material objects and tools, tools which help to make up the worldly contexts that give our activities meaning and stability. Means-ends calculations result, even if only fleetingly and in relationship to some further set of ends, in the creation of an end, a material object of some sort that outlives the moment of calculation and decision. And these material ends, as objects, appear as things in the world and so can become potential objects of judgment and evaluation. From a subjective or

objective perspective, these activities appear just as technical calculations of expected benefit, but from a worldly perspective these calculations always rely on and are interwoven with a set of objects that outlast the activity itself. It is this insight that underpins Arendt's analysis, for example, of the concept of interest. And this view implies that the material world interweaves instrumental and non-instrumental judgments. Instrumentality, in this view, does not stand opposed to value as means to end. Rather, instrumental, means-ends calculations occur in the context of objects that already open themselves up to evaluative judgments. Put differently, there is no such thing as calculation as such. Rather, and especially in the social world, technical calculation, which strives to treat subjects as objects, is mediated by material objects that potentially constitute spaces of collective, non-technical judgments.<sup>21</sup> Instrumental, means-ends calculations, even as they can be taken to succeed or fail on merely technical grounds, are also bound up with the question of the shape or appearance of the world.

And this analysis casts the relationship between instrumentality and domination in a different light. Just as instrumentality is always interwoven with spaces of appearance and judgment, so too is domination always mediated by material objects and structures that open structures of domination up to critical scrutiny, even as they serve to stabilize those relationships. These material structures are, as Latour points out, "the practical means, that is the mediators, through which inertia, durability, asymmetry, extension, domination is produced."<sup>22</sup> As several

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<sup>21</sup> This expands upon Honig's insight that institutions posit "the very human agency" that they otherwise marginalize "for the sake of equity, regularity, and predictability." Honig, *Emergency Politics: Paradox, Law, Democracy*, 85.

<sup>22</sup> Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 85. Furthermore, thinking of these material mediators in terms of worldliness enables us to capture the basic insight of Latour's notion of mediators, which he opposed to intermediaries, without his curious expansion of the notion of agency to cover any social process that is in some way unexpected or unpredictable. The input of mediators "is never a good predictor of their output" precisely because they are exposed to the world of inter-

different analyses have pointed out, domination can be fruitfully understood as a situation where one agent or group of agents has the capacity systematically order the choices and forms of agency—the lifeworlds—of those subjected to their power. While some views, such as Pettit’s, focus exclusively on the externally observable and measurable level of control, in my view an adequate account of domination, and the one I have sought to develop, must focus as well on the constitution of subjectivity through relations of domination and so on how structures of domination are bound up with cultural structures of meaning and the material world. And from this perspective, domination and instrumentality are closely bound together, as structures of domination will reproduce themselves by trying to render the social instrumentally knowable and fixing individuals as objects within a discursive field.

Yet the fact that systems of meaning are externalized into the material world through what Sewell calls the “reciprocal constitution of semiotic form and material embodiment” connects up with my analysis of value in terms of worldliness.<sup>23</sup> The embodiment of semiotic structures in material forms, even as it provides those linguistic structures with material durability, also constitutes spaces of appearance and judgment that exceed the aspirations to calculation and regularity reflected in those systems. Thus, the effort to integrate workers by redefining their democratic claims in terms of material needs and cultural respectability produced material structures that, under certain conditions, could be seized as objects of collective democratic action. More generally, the fact that structures of domination find material embodiment is what occasions the political dynamic that Habermas analyzes as the dialectic of morality. The externalization of domination in the material world renders visible the unequal

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subjective practices, in which actions start chains of processes that always outrun the intentions of the original actor. Ibid., 39.

<sup>23</sup> William H. Sewell Jr, *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 365.

distribution of social agency that characterizes domination. It potentially exposes the exploitative structure of domination—the fact that some agents simultaneously benefit from the relationship of domination while denying that they are complicit in it and so part of a common lifeworld. In Habermas's account, this exploitative structure is the crime that inaugurates the dialectic of morality as a process of political struggle. In these political processes, avowed structures of domination intermingle with suppressed conflicts, such that political institutions are at once the objects of political challenge and tools to technically manage the conflicts that result from the critical diagnosis and politicization of structures of domination. However, the Weberian and post-Weberian view, because it lacks the socio-theoretic vocabulary to analyze the interweaving of instrumentality and value in the world, can only see that latter side, in which material and semiotic institutional structures function to manage political conflicts by rendering them into technical questions of administration and management.

Finally, I want to suggest that this alternate social ontology can re-open critical questions about the relationship between democratic agency and capitalism, questions that are obscured by the Weberian and post-Weberian social ontology and theory of value, and questions that can enable us to re-conceptualize the location and democratic significance of welfare institutions in capitalist societies. From this theoretical perspective, the characteristic feature of capitalist social relations as a structure of economic production is the imperative to subordinate judgments of value to the reproduction and expansion of capital. A worldly analysis of value calls attention to how the structure of capitalist social relationships simultaneously presuppose our capacity to judge while subordinating that capacity to the logic of extra-subjective mechanisms like the market. From this perspective, a core component of the logic of capitalist social relations is the need to bypass these spaces of judgment in favor of a mechanism of evaluation such as the price

mechanism. And, as a result, the sphere of production is seen as an apolitical sphere subordinate to the automatic mechanism of the market. Thus, for a view such as Hayek's, inter-subjective judgments of value threaten to disrupt the aggregative functions of market exchanges. The logic of capitalist exchange is precisely that these worldly spaces of judgment are impossible—such that, for instance, the question of domination and control within the sphere of production cannot even appear as a potential political problem. Yet the logic of the preceding argument also implies, contrary to Arendt's own assertions, that the total expropriation of society—the transformation of all social relationships into economic relationship between things—is an impossibility, as the objectifying mechanism of exchange also calls upon our capacity for evaluative judgments. And this view can retain much of the critical and politicizing force of Marx's analysis of classical political economy without the assumption that capitalist production renders itself obsolete.

Thus, on the one hand, capitalist social relations reflect a logic that threatens to transform all judgments about the material world into means-ends, instrumental calculations subordinate to the structuring imperatives of capital accumulation. On the other hand, these forces of accumulation are always mediated by material structures that potentially open up worldly judgments and evaluative, political questions. And the political ambiguity of welfare institutions is precisely that they are worldly mediators between these competing logics. Welfare institutions both reflect the traces and sedimentations of political struggles while also being deeply bound up with the structural reproduction of capitalism. Thus, comparative analyses of welfare institutions have examined welfare institutions as either reflections of organized power on the part of subordinate groups like workers or else as functional mechanisms that enable workers to invest in the skills that are necessary for the interests of capital. In my analysis, this ambivalence of

welfare institutions reflects the interweaving of instrumentality and value in the material world. Such institutions can function to open up spaces for political judgments that exceed the calculative terms of capitalist social relations, and yet the material results of those judgments will be conditioned by capital's instrumental imperatives. Thus, welfare institutions have historically functioned to expose the arbitrary power and domination of employers within the workplace to political contestation and scrutiny, enhancing the power of labor unions by giving them a foothold within the state and raising workers' bargaining power. Furthermore, it has constituted spaces of political appearance and judgment, producing new sites of democratic participation even within administrative structures. At the same time, this materialization of workers' interests in welfare institutions risks entangling segments of the working class with the imperatives of capitalists, such that they may prioritize the returns to capital in their sector rather than broader political solidarity—risks of co-optation that produce labor aristocracies. These risks should not be dismissed out of hand, even if it is not the case that anything short of revolutionary transformation will produce such labor aristocracies

So, from this perspective, the economic is not a domain of instrumental, means-ends calculations against which democratic agency must be protected. Rather, democratic politics within capitalism can function by drawing out the capacity for judgment and our involvement in the world that capitalist structures simultaneously presuppose and deny. And democratic political movements potentially result in worldly artifacts that mediate these instrumental imperatives and open them up to future political challenge and potential transformation. To be sure, then, these instrumental imperatives and the structures of domination they support often confront individuals and social movements immobile forces—a perception which leads theorists to focus on preserving and memorializing moments of unruly popular action that escape and exceed the

calculable routines of institutional life. Yet, especially where state and economic institutions make persistent claims to legal-rational legitimacy and so to having rendered political life calculable, democratic theorists need to be alert to how their theoretical categories may reinforce, rather than historicize and challenge, the very things that foreclose more expansive democratic possibilities.

Finally, this approach suggests avenues for theorizing the relationship between capitalist imperatives and other structures of domination without reducing one to the other or suggesting that economic conflicts are more real because they concern the reproduction of society. It also enables us to think through these connections without reducing economic and material conflicts to questions of distribution and redistribution and so separating them out from struggles for recognition. Rather, in my view, the problem is a singular one—domination—and structures of domination are going to be embodied in both symbolic forms of unequal distribution of agency (what recognition theorists focus on) as well as in the material world. Furthermore, as those semiotic structures are materialized, they are going to become conditioned by and so interwoven with economic forces. Thus, the durability of symbolic systems like race or gender exists, in part, in their material embodiment both in the material world and in our bodily habits, and insofar as they enter into the material world those symbolic structures become conditioned by the instrumental imperatives of the reproduction of capital. This interplay is evident, for instance, in the contradictory ways that Swedish welfare institutions both reproduced dominant interpretations of the gendered division of labor and yet, subject to the imperatives of capital and so responding to instrumental concerns such as labor shortages, exposed the gendered division of labor within the family to critical political practice. More generally, I have suggested that these processes can be interpreted in terms of the interaction between direct, structural, and abstract

forms or faces of domination, without prejudging in our analysis which form is most prevalent at the current historical moment. Such an analysis can reveal welfare institutions, and the welfare state more broadly, not as a machine for managing social risks and inequalities in line with some set of political values that stand in need of legitimization, nor as a mechanism of integration and normalization in terms of dominant semiotic systems, but as a material, institutional structure of worldly action and judgment in the context of entrenched social relationships and processes that continuously threaten to shrink these spaces so as to render them as manageable as possible.

Today, the welfare state as it came to exist in the mid-twentieth century is in decline, leading to much discussion of the rise of neo-liberal ideology, winner-takes-all politics, and a perhaps rosy estimation of the previous glories of the era of solidaristic social welfare. The political and economic alliances that enabled the expansion of social welfare programs are, to a large extent, in the past. In the era of industrialization and its immediate aftermath, the industrial working class had the power to bring the national economy to a standstill, and it was this threat, in part, that cowed capital into accepting the various restrictions on their scope of action in the economic sphere. And while in the pre-war period this threat was real enough to require state repression, the destruction of capital stock after World War II produced the conditions for abnormally high growth—high enough to ensure both regular wage increases and high returns to capital.<sup>24</sup> Declining growth interacted with a shift away from industrial production to undermine the power of workers and occasion a capitalist counter-offensive that still defines the contours of

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<sup>24</sup> As argued in Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014).

contemporary discussions about the welfare state.<sup>25</sup> Efforts to restore growth, such as through financialization, increased capital mobility, and consumer borrowing, further undermined the solidaristic bases of social policy and produced the destabilizing crisis tendencies that helped fuel the 2008 financial crisis.<sup>26</sup> As a result, social movements have become more focused on preserving the remaining traces of that previous mid-century class compromise, protecting the limited reservoirs of social solidarity and institutional bulwarks against expropriation, rather than advancing a renewed vision of the democratization of capitalism that could occasion cross-sectional alliances and link particular social interests to a larger political project.

As a historical reconstruction of the democratic potentials of previous struggles over the social, my argument seeks to provide a useable past, neither romanticized nor cynical, that could aid in envisioning a further democratization of the welfare state and of production and developing a political strategy adequate to that vision. To put it bluntly, it would mean putting the democracy back in social democracy. Insofar as growing inequality and economic destabilization are generating new political crisis tendencies, as vividly exemplified in the political tensions and mass politics currently straining the European Union, then instrumental efforts to control conflicts could require the production of new institutional structures that can themselves become the sites of democratic action and judgment. As new conflict potentials and social needs arise and generate pressure for political intervention into the social and the economic, these interventions can be structured so as to include the direct, institutionalized participation of the grassroots, civil society groups that formulated and advanced the conflicts in the first place. Thus, on an institutional level, struggles for welfare must be connected to

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<sup>25</sup> For a compelling account of this counter-revolution and its link to low returns to capital, see Streeck, *Buying Time: The Delayed Crisis of Democratic Capitalism*.

<sup>26</sup> On the connection between these strategies and the financial crisis, see Prasad, *The Land of Too Much: American Abundance and the Paradox of Poverty*.

questions of democratic participation in the administration of welfare institutions—forms of participation that would also give social movement actors the resources and institutional footholds that generate expansionary political logics. Furthermore, it would mean formulating political strategies that strive to democratize the current administration of welfare programs, especially programs that can function to politicize new social domains and organize subordinate groups, such as unemployment insurance, public childcare provisions, or anti-poverty programs.

My goal has been to provide theoretical resources for viewing these social and economic conflicts as potential occasions for democratic action, action that could find its worldly embodiment in participatory institutions within administrative and economic structures. Indeed, these democratic possibilities accompanied, albeit as fragments, the initial rise of welfare institutions in Bismarck's Germany. Struggles for gender equality have likewise used welfare institutions to generate new modes of democratic action and to fuel social movements seeking to transform entrenched relationships of social domination. The challenge facing political actors today is to devise strategies that could overcome the entrenched privilege of economic elites and dominant social groups—strategies that will also provide the solidaristic power of social movements with a material, institutional form that outlasts their episodic mobilizations, becoming the basis of future struggles for a more democratic and participatory welfare state.

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