

Interrogations #3. Therborn: What does the ruling class do? Part II

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1. Benny Witkovsky

To what extent is the consciousness or ideology of either the ruling class or the ruled significant to Therborn's understanding of state power? Much of last week's readings seemed to argue that states should be measured by the effects of their policies - that intentions and self-professed identities were almost irrelevant to defining the character of the state. Therborn appeared to use this approach to the state to get around Weber's notion of legitimacy or the concept of ruling through consent of the governed.

However, in the second half of the book Therborn frequently discusses the role of ideology in state power, arguing that legitimacy and consent aren't irrelevant but rather are incomplete explanations for the role ideology plays in state action. He goes on to show the ideological perceptions at work in the formation of political strategies, the role of nationalism and religion, and the discussion of the ruled as 'captive audiences' for particular messages. Is this a contradiction with his earlier focus on the effects of state action? Or is it perfectly logical to see ideology as not fundamentally constitutive of the state, but a tool that the state uses to maintain its power? Finally, is this dynamic the same for the ruling class, subordinate members of ruling coalitions and the ruled? or are consciousness and ideology more critical for some than others?

Commented [EW1]: Maybe for *defining* the character of the state, but this doesn't mean that they are unimportant for explaining various aspects of what actually happens. State apparatuses provide channels which "delimit the field of possible politics" (164), but that still leaves space for agency, and thus ideology.

Commented [EW2]: Ideology matters wherever strategy and struggle comes into play, so it matters for ruling classes as well as subordinate classes.

2. Kaan Jittiang

In the second essay of the book, Therborn paid attention to the topic where the title of the book comes from, "what does the ruling class do when it rules?" He answered this question pointing to the way in which the ruling class reproduces the economic, political and ideological relations of its dominion by exercising state power. The state power, according to Therborn, is determined by two important determinants: one is the mode of reproduction and another is the loss of power and Therborn seemed to argue strongly on p.176 that both factors play an equally important role in determining state power. He said, "[t]he mechanism of reproduction may in fact function equally as ones of revolution." He then added on, "the processes of social reproduction *are at the same time* the processes of social revolution." My confusion lies there: how are both processes at the end of the day the very same process?

Commented [EW3]: You have misinterpreted the point of Therborn's discussion on p.176. He saying that the same sorts of mechanisms that foster reproduction can - in revolutionary conditions - be turned against reproduction. The simplest example is violence: this is one of the mechanisms of reproduction, but it can also be used in revolutions. The same for economic constraint and ideological excommunication.

3. Youbin Kang

To what extent do we agree with Therborn's central claim? "The ruling class problematic, as it is exhibited in the class struggle, is primarily characterized not by the need to secure legitimation of its rule, but by the attempt to ensure representation in the special apparatus of the state together with state mediation of its rule over other classes." (p.243)

Here are two arguments that could be made against this statement:

Firstly, Therborn emphasizes the agency to state power over those of the ruled. He argues that the Weberian theory of the process of legitimating state power to the ruled assumes a rationalistic behavior of the ruled, which is not always true as the ruled are often ignorant or passive (p.171). He presents all facets of state mediation of having a distinct intention and a rationalization process (that points to the benefits of the capitalist class), such as when the state passes laws to curtail working hours or raise wages - to secure surplus labor. Is Therborn

taking too much of an obdurate unilateral approach in claiming that mediation efforts, such as social democratic governments was merely a “tool” to maintain capitalism (p.211)? Could it also be that capitalist class interests may be an object to maintain social democracy?

Secondly, Therborn does not critically and comprehensively address the constraints to the bourgeois state’s ability to pursue its naked **state interests**. Globalization and supra-national powers have been central to directing policies of the state. Although Therborn mentions the examples of MNEs that objectify states as market calculations (p.167-8), I wonder whether Therborn has considered the actual inability of some countries to mediate anticapitalistic policies. For example, countries such as Korea has been unable to have a strong hand in negotiating free trade agreements with the US, while post-crisis EU countries have been forcibly pressured into passing strong austerity measures. To me, it seems clear that global forces of dependency, global supply chain dynamics, and geopolitics are innovative elements of bourgeois rule. However, less clear is how these transnational private interests manifest (or coerce themselves) within the State apparatus, and why they have been leading to ruptures that have a distinctive anti-capitalistic flavor (such as the populist social movements in the EU, **Trump’s rejection of the TPP**, and militant unionism in the periphery).

Commented [EW4]: But remember, in the section around p.147 Therborn also acknowledges that the effects on the relations of production of the exercise state power can be to go against the dominant relations. He also notes later that in capitalism there is a “zone of compromise” (210) which may sometimes be suboptimal for capitalism

Commented [EW5]: What do you mean by “state interests”?

Commented [EW6]: This isn’t really anti-*capitalist*; it may be anti-neoliberal, but that is not the same as anticapitalism since it doesn’t pose any alternative to capitalism at all.

4. Aaron Yarmel

On page 152, Therborn writes the following: “In the Russian case, the previous revolutionary transformation of the state apparatus enabled this historical tum to be accomplished within a basic political continuity - even if it did not rule out violence and purges at the top. By contrast, where a particular class complements its economic advance by gaining the upper hand in the state apparatus, the rupture of the former class alliance has tended to take the form of a more or less violent revolutionary break.” It looks like Therborn’s claim is that we can distinguish between two sorts of cases in which a class makes economic advancements. **In the first sort of case,** the state apparatus does not change when a particular class gains economic advancements. In the second sort of case, there is a change in the state apparatus; in particular, the class making the economic advancements ‘gains the upper hand.’ What is unclear to me is the *causal* relationship between the change in the state apparatus and the economic advancement of a particular class. How, exactly, does Therborn understand this relationship?

Commented [EW7]: You are missing a crucial sentence in the previous paragraph, where Therborn writes: “they [The Russian Revolution and others] brought about a more or less complete smashing and transformation of the bourgeois state apparatus.” The alliance between the proletariat and other classes after this “smashing” thus took place in a state which had a “proletarian character”, which meant that later when the alliance was abandoned the state itself did not need to be radically changed (it had already been radically changed). This is different from the case in which the bourgeoisie was already in an alliance with feudal elites within the Absolutest state.

On one reading, the relationship is like this: the state apparatus needed to change in order to become compatible with the economic advancements (i.e., before the change, the state apparatus itself was incompatible with it). This is to say, the change in the state apparatus was a necessary condition for the economic advancement. On another reading, the relationship is like this: the change in the state apparatus was an additional symptom of a class gaining power, but it neither caused nor was caused by the economic advancement. I am sure that there are other possible readings too (e.g., the change in the state apparatus was not a necessary condition for the economic advancement, but it crystalized it).

5. Loren Peabody

I'm curious about the contrast of structural Marxist theories of state power to non-Marxian alternatives and the adequacy of Therborn's grounds for dismissing the latter. Four alternatives he outlines are:

- The pluralist approach: "decision-making power is fragmented among groups which have little or no connection with one another" (p. 135).
- The elitist approach: "different moments in the exercise of power in society... [are] united by a cohesive elite" (p. 135); this perspective could probably be further broken down into accounts which emphasize an "institutional elite" and those which emphasize a purely economic elite.
- The "economic" approach: from his reference to Buchanan and Tullock, I take this to mean that state power is mainly exercised as patrimonial exchange relations between incumbent politicians creating rents for their supporters in the private sector.
- The Weberian approach: political power generally cannot be explained by reference to the interests of classes or status groups because political interests are based on autonomous ideologies or the pursuit of power as such (p. 142-143); this prefigures the "state-centered" approach of Skocpol and others.

Therborn mentions the methodological critique of pluralism that, by restricting analysis to readily visible conflicts, latent conflicts and the power to exclude are obscured (p. 136). Yet sharing with the pluralists a "subjectivist" orientation, he doesn't think that the elitist approaches are much of an improvement. Although he seems to suggest that they are both concerned with special cases that can be incorporated by the more general theory offered by the Marxist perspective (p. 133), I take it that his main response to them is to shift the question under focus. Instead of asking "who has power?" (p. 130), Therborn wants to ask, "how is power exercised?" (p. 131), "what does the ruling class do?" "what is the role of the state in reproduction?" (p. 138). But doesn't his question presume that there is a ruling class, something that we ought to show empirically against the objections of the pluralists? Is it really safe to say that "by definition, every state has a class character, and every class society has a ruling class (or bloc of ruling classes)" (p. 132, emphasis added). Or when he characterizes his project as making the methodological choice of investigating the effects that state power has on the reproduction of capitalist relations (e.g., p. 161), doesn't he need to reply empirically to the possibility that state power can be dysfunctional, as in the case of patrimonialism, or that state power can't be explained by its functionality for societal interests, as the state-centered theorists would have it? It's not that I really disagree with Therborn's structural Marxian approach, it's just that he seems to be arguing on methodological and theoretical grounds when empirical support might be in order.

6. Pete Ramand

Therborn notes that one of the distinctive features of capitalism (compared to both feudalism and socialism) is the separation of private and public spheres. Nevertheless, many social democratic regimes made Keynesian counter-cyclical interventions in the post-war period. This allowed for at least a modicum of democratic accountability of the economic. A notable feature of the neoliberal era (and third-way politics etc.) has been the almost complete removal of the economic from the political sphere.

Equally globalization and the construction of transnational governance structures complicate some of the arguments made by Therborn regarding formats of representation.

While Therborn operates at a high level of abstraction, rarely distinguishing between different periods of capitalism, do we need to update any of his arguments about either state power or

Commented [EW8]: There is a two-step process in play here: (1) identifying the dominant class within the dominant mode of production, and (2) establishing the state reproduces those relations of production. If those two conditions are established, then there is a ruling class.

Commented [EW9]: It is basically a necessary condition for a society to count as a "class society" that there be a dominant class within class relations – or at least, that is a necessarily condition within a Marxian account of classes. A dominant class is a *ruling* class when there is a state which generates actions that reproduces the class relations (mode of production or relations of production).

Commented [EW10]: It could be dysfunctional, but this would mean that it was ineffectively reproducing the relations of production and thus the ruling class would deteriorate in its dominant position over time.

Commented [EW11]: But note how careful Keynesian policies generally were to not encroach on private investment as such. There was much state spending that complemented private investment or provided public goods of various sorts, etc., but not a lot of erosion of private property as such.

the state apparatus in light of the transformations of state and society in the years since the publication of this book?

7. Courtney Deisch

Therborn identifies a central problematic of the class character of state power as that of the “*effects of the state upon the production and reproduction of given modes of production.*” (144). Within this view of state power that is dependent upon the *effects of the state*, Therborn seems to limit his analysis of state power. He depends upon the “content and effects of state policies” as the measure of state power (155). Later, his discussion of the determinants of state power- the level of possibility and viability of a given class rule within a state apparatus- is heavily reliant upon the impact of the international context upon state power. Two of his four axis of determination are centered upon an understanding of the international context within which a state operates its power (162). In his description of determinants of state power, he emphasizes the importance of international exchange to the production and reproduction of given class structures, which seems to indicate the importance of international exchange, therefore, with regard to the class character of state power.

Does Therborn’s measure of state power (the content and effects of state policy) sufficiently encompass all important aspects of the concept? Should the measure include more specific reference, for example, to the structure of the forces of production or geopolitical pressures on the state in an international context? How can Therborn separate international context from his measure of a state’s ability to produce and reproduce a given mode of production, yet depend so heavily upon the international context in the determination of state power?

Commented [EW12]: One possibility is that these various international forces effectively undermine or weaken state power: that is, the capacity of state policies to effectively reproduce the relations of production declines. Or, it could be that there is a different kind of reproduction process going on which involves new formats of representation and mediation which, somehow, operate at the transnational level. This is sort of what Conti is arguing.

8. Sarah Farr

I am interested in the task of identifying the ruling class. Part of this brings us back to our last class discussion, since the distinction between the class character of power and the state apparatus is important in the identification of the ruling class. For Therborn, the ruling class is the class that wields state power. In other words, the ruling class is that which dominates the mode of production that is maintained or strengthened by the actions of the state (the effects of state policy). Therborn then adds another dimension: the reproduction of the class character of the state apparatus (in addition to the reproduction of the mode of production). In his schema (p. 147), he presents us with a complex matrix on these two axes. He proposes that state power could simultaneously strengthen the dominance of the ruling class’s mode of production while undermining the ruling class’s dominance in the state apparatus (or vice versa, if I am understanding this correctly). Do we take this to mean long-term vs. short-term interests? Is the axis of ultimate importance the effects of state power on the mode of production (for which the class character of the state apparatus can influence)? When can we expect a change in the ruling class? Therborn offers Peronist Argentina as regime that went against both the capitalist state apparatus and capitalist mode of production without “offering a socialist alternative,” (154) which made the regime untenable in the long run. Which quadrants of his schema are inherently unstable?

Commented [EW13]: You stated this in exactly the right way.

Commented [EW14]: I think you are right that the axis of relations of production is the more fundamental, since the state apparatuses “function” is precisely to facilitate state policies that accomplish effective reproduction. Thus, when there is a disjuncture, something is out of wack.

9. Janaina Saad

Therborn’s analytical schema for assessing the class character of state power (p.147) considers only the “direct and immediate” effects of state intervention (on both the class character of the state apparatus and its corresponding relations of production). By focusing

only on the *immediate* effects of state intervention, he attempts to eschew the potential problem of wrongfully identifying the class character of state power based on medium and long term *unintended* effects of state action. He gives the example of the French *ancien régime*; although the medium-term effect of its feudal fiscal structure was the establishment of a bourgeois state apparatus (by being a major cause of the French Revolution), it would be wrong to characterize the fiscal policy of the *ancien régime* as an expression of bourgeois state power. Therborn's "solution" to the problem of misidentifying the class character of state power is purely one of time-scale—to focus only on the short-term effects of state intervention. However, we could imagine state interventions that have an immediate unintended effect of undermining the existing state apparatus and/or relations of production in which case one could still wrongfully identify the class character of state power even when focusing on immediate effects. The problem, as I see it, is not only of a temporal nature but also of accounting for unintended effects (regardless of the time scale). My question is then the following: *if we define the class character of state power based only on the effects of state intervention, what problems might arise—with respect to characterizing state power—when these effects correspond to unintended consequences?* If we are to use Therborn's analytical schema as a research guide, perhaps we would need to look not only at the effects of state intervention but also at the intention behind this intervention in order to empirically locate the class character of state power. ||

10. Kurt Kuehne

In highlighting the importance of ideological formation, Therborn argues that ideology is not merely a set of conscious opinions. Rather, "ideology functions by moulding personality...[it] tells what is right and wrong, good and bad, thereby determining not only conceptions of legitimacy of power, but also work-ethics, notions of leisure, and views of interpersonal relationship, from comradeship to sexual love" (p. 172). In short, he states that ideology is about deeply, deeply internalized understandings of what the world is and how one must live in it.

To what extent does the state have agency in this process of ideological formation, and by what means? Therborn acknowledges the relevance of both consent and coercion in ideological and social reproduction, but when he introduces the actual *mechanics* of reproduction (pp. 173-174), he describes them as sanction-based responses: economic constraint, violence, and ideological excommunication.

Frankly, I'm surprised by the general lack of reference to public education and/or elite educational institution. On page 194, for example, a brief reference to elite institutions around the world is made only to suggest that political and managerial elites often have close personal ties from their school days. But many other writers in this vein of discourse on social reproduction and/or state-citizen relations (e.g., Bourdieu, Waquant, Gramsci, Benedict Anderson, Michael Apple) would say it's impossible to talk about ideological formation without reference to the state's role in education. I think that's sensible; schools are probably the earliest, most sustained, most direct site of interaction between the citizen and state institution. Most students will sit in state-managed public schools for 30+ hours a week for 12 years or so. ||

These writers would argue that education systems do not merely *impose* social divisions over resistant subjects, but that students are also meant to *internalize* 'approved' social rules and their social roles within them. In this view, classrooms provide a rationalized framework to justify to each student his or her 'place' in the social order, and to thereby coax acquiescence from the individual. For Bourdieu, for instance, elite educational institutions mediate between competing forms of social power. They transmute economic and cultural capital into academic credentials, thereby interweaving modern society's array of elite

Commented [EW15]: You raise really important issues here. Therborn wants to avoid "intentional" effects because that smacks of subjectivism. So the intended vs unintended introduces ideas outside of his main form of analysis. He somehow wants to identify some effects as directly reflecting the class character of an apparatus and others as side-effects or ramifications given the specificities of the context. Thus the fiscal machinery of the Absolutest state in France had a feudal character and directly contributed to the reproduction of the feudal hierarchy embodied in that state form, but generated a fiscal crisis which ultimately destroyed the state. This is not exactly "intended" vs "unintended"; or maybe, it is that, but is also a diagnosis of the role of that form of the state within stable feudalism and then how it becomes dysfunctional under altered conditions (a different social formation).

Commented [EW16]: The state certainly enacts policies which bear heavily on ideology. I am not so sure Therborn would want to say "agency".

Commented [EW17]: In Therborn's other important book – *The power of ideology and the ideology of power* – he talks more about education, but even there the main thrust of the argument about ideology-inculcation is the affirmations and sanctions of everyday life (the processes of what he calls subjection and qualification) that form these beliefs/dispositions.

fields—the political, the intellectual, the managerial, the industrialist, and others—into a concentrated and self-legitimizing ‘field of power.’

So, I’m a bit puzzled by Therborn’s discussion of ideology and the mechanics of social reproduction. I’m not quite clear on how he envisions the state’s role, agency, and primary means of dealing with the ideology question. Is the state active in reshaping the ideological ‘rules of the game,’ or is it mostly a reflection? Are there critical factors that change the answer? I’m not convinced that economic constraint, violence, and ideological excommunication are the main mechanisms of reproduction.

Commented [EW18]: Therborn’s treatment is more in line with Bowles and Gintis in *Schooling in Capitalist America*.

Commented [EW19]: Again, the ideology book is the place to look for these elaborations. There are ideological apparatuses parallel to state apparatuses, and ideological practices parallel to state policies through which ideology-effects are generated.

11. Samina Hossain

At the end of the first essay, Therborn lays out fundamental contradictions that plague each type of class apparatus. In the feudal state, the pressures of centralization and capital undercut the authority of both the royal and aristocratic classes. In the bourgeoisie state, imperatives of expansion and management empower the working class. In the socialist state, the task of abolishing class division produces a vanguard-masses distinction. Therborn continues on this theme into the next essay, though this time focusing on the bourgeoisie state alone with an innovative application. Marx’s discussion on contradictions or fetters, which eventually lead to a change in modes of production, is in economic terms. Therborn extends the argument to the political and ideological determinants of state power, with the political analogy being domination versus execution and the ideological analogy being subjection versus qualification. My question is, should we interpret these tensions not as “irritants” but rather as a pull toward an elusive equilibrium?

Commented [EW20]: Nicely written synoptic statement about these issues.

Commented [EW21]: They are more a pull towards a dis-equilibrium – that is, the disjuncture between domination and execution undermines the way in which state apparatuses channel state policies in a reproductive manner, so this can destabilize the exercise of state power.

12. Masoud Movahed

In the second essay, entitled “State Power, on the Dialectics of Class Rule,” Therborn addresses the modalities of the capitalist state in order to analyze the paradox of the bourgeois democracy. Therborn posits that “the entire Marxist tradition has had enormous difficulty coming to grips with paradoxical phenomenon of bourgeois democracy – a regime in which the exploiting minority rules by means of a system of legally free popular elections” (p. 248). Therborn defines state power as interventions (i.e. state policies influencing production and reproduction of social order) by the ruling class through state apparatuses in the process of social formation, whose ultimate aim is to reproduce the capitalist social reproduction. These interventions—which, according to Therborn, are carried out in struggle with other classes-- seek to guarantee and reproduce the dominant position of the ruling class in the economic sphere, the class character of the state apparatuses and the ideological interpellations generated by the ruling class.

Commented [EW22]: It is probably better to say interventions by the state in order to reproduce the dominance of the ruling class, rather than interventions “by the ruling class” as such. Therborn sometimes does slip into more subjectivist/agency language – the ruling class *wields* state power, for example – but mostly he tries to avoid that.

Commented [EW23]: This is a French word – interpellations – that comes from Althusser.

Commented [EW24]: It doesn’t really “ensure” specific outcomes, but rather “delimits the field of possible politics” (164). There is no guaranteed functionality.

In the process of reproduction, Therborn claims that the character of the state apparatus is determinant; in that it must be composed in such way that it ensures and expedites the formulation and execution of state reproductive interventions. However, state power is wielded within two modes of relationships: mediation and representation. Therborn argues that “the state, particularly its commanding personnel, must represent, that is to say, promote and defend the ruling class and its mode of exploitation and supremacy. At the same time, the state must mediate the exploitation and domination of the ruling class over classes and strata. In other words, it follows from the irreducible material specificity of the class state that is

simultaneously both an expression of class exploitation and domination, and something more than a simple expression – something other than the non-state ruling class apparatuses necessary to support these relations” (p. 181). And from this formulation, Therborn generates a concrete typology of bourgeois models of representation and mediation. While describing the six forms of representation and mediation, Therborn catalogues a whole gamut of historical variants in which the bourgeois secured influence over the personnel of the capitalist state by ways of coercion and or persuasion.

Therborn’s second half of the book is, perhaps, an attempt to transcend the subjectivist analysis of the state apparatuses and generate an objective representation of its class character. However, it seems to me that Therborn, as much as he wishes to escape the overemphasis of “instrumentalism,” he fails to do so in his second half of the book. For example, in the discussion of bourgeois formats of representation, Therborn focuses on the need of bourgeoisie to secure representation in the state apparatus, in order to exercise power in the process of social reproduction. This seems inconsistent with his argument in the first part of the book that the structural characteristics of the state apparatus determines its class character; or its objective congruence with the needs of the dominant class. Moreover, Therborn in his second essay seems to suggest that the relationship of the bourgeoisies to the capitalist state is instrumentalist. For instance, Therborn states: “in the class struggle, the ruling class must ensure such representation in and such mediation through the state, that the latter successfully contributes to the reproduction of its economic, political and ideological position within the complex reproductive totality...State economic policies will further maintain the position of the ruling class in a given conjuncture, only if it is adequately represented in the state and if efficient processes of state mediation are employed” (p.182). The instrumentalist conception is obvious in the passage above. Therborn’s instrumentalist approach can also be seen in his analysis of two particular forms of capitalist state: Bonapartist Imperial State and Social Democratic governments, where he asserts that Social Democracies are “viable instrument of the bourgeois rule” (p.210). So does Therborn contradict his thesis of the first essay?

Commented [EW25]: But isn't the argument that all of these "formats of representation", in different times and places, solve the problem of recruiting the "commanding personnel" to actually formulate the policies. These formats are "structural"; they are designed to solve a specific problem. The issue addressed here is how can they solve this problem in such a way that they continue to effectively represent the bourgeoisie given that in general the personnel are not themselves capitalists.

Commented [EW26]: It is only partially instrumentalist – and probably this reflects a looseness of language, a difficult in expressing the underlying conceptual point. The statement “the ruling class *must ensure*” makes it seem like a group of capitalists sit down a ask, “how can we ensure X, Y and Z.” But really, I think what he is saying is signaled by the expression “in the class struggle”. This could be written: “It is crucial for the enduring power of the bourgeoisie that the formats of representation and mediation that result from class struggle provide effective representation of the capitalist class.....”

Commented [EW27]: I think he only means a viable apparatus through which bourgeois rule is secured. He doesn't mean a viable instrument that the bourgeoisie, as a collective subject, can consciously manipulate for its purposes.

13. Griffin JM Bur

My main question this week is: what is the logical structure of Section 2 of the book and how might we synthesize and “operationalize” the arguments made in it? I think that I comprehend many of the section’s individual arguments, and the very broad overall argument (outlined in the only part highlighted in bold after this paragraph). However, I am struggling to identify the relationship between the wide variety of topics discussed, the many taxonomies (such as the four axes of determination) and subsections (such as the three modes of ideological interpellation), and the overarching logic of the second chapter--besides the fact that they are all relevant to analysis of state power. I found many parts of the section very interesting and stimulating, but I feel that I am missing--almost certainly due to error on my end--some kind of “mid-level” argument that connects the many individual arguments Therborn makes and the highest-level argument that he makes. *My question is fully specified in this brief bold section; below I have simply tried to summarize some of those arguments as clearly as possible and to note where I do not understand their relationship to one another. It is long-winded but I also feel guilty about making a claim about the organization of a book without attempting to ground this claim in textual evidence; it’s mostly just given for reference.*****

Chapter One begins by specifying several related objects of inquiry. Therborn begins this section by asking about “the character of the relationship between, on the one hand, social classes...and, on the other, the exercise of political power through the state” (129) but also such elementary questions as how one might go about determining whether there exists “a ruling class in this or that country”, which class it is, and how it rules (ibid). Though these are related questions, they are also each a unique question and none of them is singled out as the primary one. Therborn spends the rest of the chapter 1) differentiating an historical materialist approach to the question of power from both of the two most prominent “subjectivist” approaches (theories of elitism and pluralism) and 2) to also differentiate it from Weber (whom he views somewhat more sympathetically). The gist is that an historical materialist approach to power asks “[w]hat kind of society and what basic relations of production are being reproduced” (138). This is then reformulated in Chapter Two in somewhat different terms, as two methodological “guidelines” to the study of “class, state and power”: the class character of state power should be elucidated *for the reason that* “the ruling class is defined as such by its exercise of that power” and state (or “political”) power should be analyzed “in relation to the ongoing processes of social reproduction and transformation” (144).

The next step in the argument comes in Chapter Two: Therborn moves to identify *what it is* that is being reproduced by state power. **Having asked what state power does, and knowing the stakes of that question (the ruling class is a class that exercises state power) he answers that it reproduces “three basic objects: the relations and forms of production, the character of the state apparatus, and the...ideological superstructure...”** (145). Therborn then moves to define the class character of each object; this is easy in the first case (because relations of production are in fact that which *define* classes), trickier but accomplished in the second case (in the book’s first essay) and unfinished in the case of ideology (Therborn asks us to leave it as a black box). Having done this, he spends the rest of Chapter Two on several separate arguments. First he argues that before proceeding, we must “order” the effects of state intervention (146) on 1) relations of production and 2) on the class character of the state apparatus; in the following four-by-four table this is carried out on a scale of “friendliness ← → hostility” to the two objects in question. This is a useful taxonomy, I think. The next six pages, 148 to 154, begin mapping some of the complexity of the preceding schema when it is applied to reality. This complexity derives from many sources: societies contain multiple modes of production (I don’t find this Althusser-inspired formulation especially helpful, at least as it applies to capitalism, but that’s an aside), state power and state apparatus cannot be as cleanly distinguished as the table implies, relations of production can’t be cleaved from ideology or the state, and so on. This prompts Therborn to raise three issues: “the weight to be attached to the character of the state apparatus; the meaning of class alliance; and the content of hegemony within an alliance composed of entire classes or fractions thereof” (150). I can’t totally figure out what the upshot of this discussion is, and some of the formulations regarding the “strategic time dimension to the consolidation and preservation of state power” are only briefly raised here. Coming to the final section of the chapter, “Definitions and Procedures”, we now add to our procedural toolkit the proviso that we should apply the four-by-four table at least twice in any concrete analysis (because class alliances mean that there is rarely only one type of production relations, state apparatus or ideology to be considered). Finally, Therborn moves to place the resulting “multitude of possible combinations of state interventions into certain delimiting sets or defining thresholds” (155) which include “rule by a single class”, “a class alliance in power”, and (maybe?) “class fractions” (155-7). The chapter ends with an extended commentary on a number of divergent issues, from Poulantzas’ power bloc concept (criticized sharply), Gramsci’s theory of hegemony (of some but a limited use), the difference between a class alliance and a class concession, and whether or not monopoly capital rules alone or as a dominant fraction, before we return to the main topic by defining further several of the cells in the four-by-four table (159-61).

Chapter Three resumes the attempt to define the problem of state power from a different angle; now the “character of state power is defined by the two fundamental processes of determination of the superstructure by the base”--the logic of the mode of production and the class struggle, which Therborn (in my view correctly) identifies as obverses of each other (162). But simultaneously, there is yet one more way we might consider the problem of state power--as determined by four axes: “1) the stage of development of the relevant mode of production; 2) the place of the mode of production within the international stage of the same mode; 3) The conjunctural articulation of all modes existing within the social formation; 4) The insertion of the social formation in the international system of related social formations at a given point in time” (162). After some meditation on the concept of “reproduction”, Therborn shifts to a discussion of the character of the state/economy relationship (164-171, a solid discussion but one which I have a hard time locating in the flow of the argument). Then comes a very interesting, more novel discussion of the “three modes of ideological interpellation” (171-3) but again, a discussion that in my view bears an unclear relation to the argument of the chapter (other than the fact that it is germane in a broad sense). I would also include within that category the following two sections, “The Mechanics of Reproduction” (173- 176) and “The Loss of State Power” (176-9).

Chapter Four is the part of the section that makes the most sense to me. It sets out a typology of the “main bourgeois formats of representation”--capitalist institutionalization, notables, the bourgeois party, statism, movement-statism and the labor party--which works well as a hybrid descriptive-analytical discussion of different forms of political life that have characterized different national or regional capitalisms (185-218). The schema it sets out is a clear and persuasive answer to the question “how is this [capitalist state] power actually wielded and exercised?” (185).

Chapter Five is also an interesting discussion of processes of mediation (in the sense of the “execution of class power” rather than arbitration between classes) was interesting (219-240). I think I understand the distinction between the two means of this mediation of the ruler/ruled relationship: the role of the state as a “centralized external power” that gathers up “resources of the ruling class” (219) but also the role of the state as a “totalizer” of social relations (ibid). I am admittedly still not sure what role this taxonomy plays, although I think it’s useful to probe how a ruling class might induce the ruled to “both submit to the established order and contribute to its functioning” (219).

Finally, I found the brief “Summing-up” (241-4) helpful but less synthetic than I would have liked. Some issues, such as the reproductive mechanisms detailed earlier, are revisited, but, for example, the fourfold determination of class power (which seems to me to be worthy of an extended discussion) is not.

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Therborn criticizes the “subjectivist approach” (p. 130) which, broadly speaking, is interested in who or how many rule and argues that state power is determined by “an ongoing process of societal reproduction and transformation,” i.e. the “mode of production” and “class struggle” (p. 242). The class character of a given state is then determined by reference to a conceptual scheme classifying whether its policies further, maintain, go against or break with the existing societal relations. Would someone interested in understanding the details of state policies over a given period be well equipped with Therborn’s theory? Does it predict under which conditions we are more or less likely to observe certain policies (or types of policies under Therborn’s scheme)? Therborn concedes for example that the extent of conflict “between monopoly and competitive capital [...] is an empirical question” (p. 158). Might some of the tools and perspectives of the subjectivist approach be useful, such as a more detailed understanding of

structures of governance, networks, distribution of resources, organization of labour etc? (The opposite question is of course whether someone interested in understanding the consistent and long-standing strong influence of capital over state policies would be well equipped with tools from the subjectivist approach?)