

## Sociology 924. Reading Interrogations #3. Jessop

September 29, 2011

[Note: I put the interrogations that focused on the paper "Putting states in their place" at the end. I should have indicated that the interrogations for this week should have been on the book, *The Future of the Capitalist State*. The paper was mainly included to provide more background in which to locate Jessop's broad approach]

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### 1. Emanuel Ubert

#### 1. Crisis moments and imbalance

Changes in the balance of forces mobilized behind and across different types of struggles can create "a situation of more or less acute crisis, a potential movement of decisive transformation and an opportunity of decisive intervention." According to Jessop, such a situation creates an "imbalance" in which a crisis situation "is objectively over-determined but subjectively indeterminate." This imbalance in turn creates spaces for "determined strategic interventions to significantly redirect the course of events as well as for attempts to 'muddle through' in the hope that the situation will resolve itself in time" (p. 92).

What does it mean to say that crisis situations are "objectively over-determined" and "subjectively indeterminate"? **[The expression "over-determined" gets used in social theory in different ways, and often it isn't exactly clear what it means. Some people seem to simply mean "complexly determined" as in the idea that the "whole is greater than the sum of its parts" (i.e. the whole is not determined by an additive function of the causes generated by all of the parts, but by their complex forms of interactions – and thus the determination of the whole is nonlinear). I think (but I am not 100% sure) that Jessop's usage of the term involves a contrast is between three contexts in which causes are identified to explain an outcome: (1) the outcome is *determined* by the causes = necessary & sufficient conditions exist; (2) the outcome is *underdetermined* by the causes = necessary but not sufficient conditions have been specified; (3) the outcome is *overdetermined* = redundant causes are present in the sense that there are *multiple sufficient causes* present (eg dropping a glass bottle onto a marble floor and hitting it with a baseball bat before it hits the floor. A ship sinks after being torpedoed during a monstrous typhoon. In both cases the destruction of the object is "overdetermined"). So, in Jessop's analysis the crises are overdetermined in the sense that there are multiple sufficient conditions for generating the crisis – there isn't just one simple contradiction, there are many, and they interact in nonlinear ways intensifying each other. You could remove one and the crisis would still be intense. But these situations are subjectively underdetermined (which I think is the same as indeterminate) in the sense that there are many possible subjective responses and courses of action that can be pursued in response to the crisis.]**

Are such spaces (opened up by the imbalance of crisis moments) the kind of interstitial openings Erik seems to see as necessary conditions for specific institutional configurations to have transformative effects?

#### 2. Complex trial-and-error search process

Jessop repeatedly states that, following crises, the "conditions for accumulation and regulation often get identified only through a trial-and-error search that reveals them more through repeated failure than sustained success" (p.30).

What “governs” the outcomes of such trial-and-error search processes? Given that such process take place within a structural environment (albeit a broken one/ one in crisis), should we conceptualize it as process bound by some historic structural logic or simply as random process in which new configurations and possibilities are tried out at random?

In the former (structurally bound) case, is there some kind of evolutionary logic governing this trial and error search process and the final selection of new conditions/ alternatives, what governs such evolutionary selection (e.g. efficiency, power, etc.), and how does this impact the transformative potential of “determined strategic interventions” mentioned above?

Does the latter (random) case imply that transformative outcomes are (even tendentially) unpredictable (such as the outcome of chaotic bifurcations)?

**Too many specific questions for me to respond to each one...I think the main point here is that the actors do not have viable solutions in hand based on adequate knowledge of what will work or even adequate knowledge of their own interests in genuine crisis conditions. In exploring the actual trajectory of trial-and-error attempts and iterations, then, one needs to figure out (1) where the experiments come from, (2) what determines their immediate real consequences, (3) what determines what is learned from an assessment of those consequences, and (4) what new actions are taken in light of the learning that takes place. It is important to remember here that the wrong lessons can be learned from a trial and error process – this is NOT like biological natural selection where there is a blind-mechanism of selection (reproductive fitness); here the stabilization of institutions in general depends in part of how actors think about the effects of the experiments. Now, all of this being said, one could posit as a general model that the intensity of the trial-and-error search for new institutional solutions tends to decline when crisis pressures subside, and to the extent that the discovery of new institutional configurations in this situation has contributed to the decline of crisis pressures, then this will help consolidate a new regime of regulation (or whatever terms one wants to use). The messiness of all of this comes from the fact that it is always mediated by cognitive processes and subjective understandings, and these can be really screwy sometimes (as in the present moment).**

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## 2. Naama Nager

There is a very neat organization of Jessop's argumentation, so that one can basically summarize his book into a single 4-columns table. His theoretical foundations - institutional & evolutionary economics, political economy, critical discourse analysis and systems ecology - each explains one of the four key features of capitalist states, and together breed his methodology, with its four analytic dimensions: economic policy, social policy, the social fix and self-organization. These dimensions inform his observation of the four crises of the KWNS as well as the respective four arenas of change from KWNS to SWPR.

My question is: is not this schematic organization of Jessop's claim too neat? Does not this way of presenting and arranging his finding serve to highlight the change in state regimes rather than the continuity? **[In a way all good schemas are “too neat” in the sense that they make the world seem more analytically ordered that it actually is. No Lake is made up only of H<sub>2</sub>O, so to speak. But I am not sure that the schemas he uses really are more suited to understanding change than structural configurations and thus being able to identify the continuities across regimes in elements of those configurations.]**

Here's one particular implication of the above question: Jessop claims that states can be studied in terms of six interrelated aspects (three institutional and three 'substantive and strategic'). Of these aspects, his four-dimensional analytic discussion lacks discussion of "modes of political representation and their articulation" - or, in short, of liberal democracy, the state aspect exhibiting the smallest change of regime (so far?). I know Jessop discussed democracy elsewhere, but I wonder what we can gather from its relative absence in this discussion (especially in light of anti-democratic trends in the world). **[You are right that the issue of democratic representation, its forms and mechanisms, its articulation to other aspects of the state, etc., are not so systematically elaborated in this discussion, and there is at least formal continuity in these terms across time in a lot of this. On the other hand, the actual functioning of these mechanisms of representation – in the US at least – does seem to have undergone very substantial transformation in the course of the episodic crises of the past decades, as the associational component of representation from below – mainly via labor – has disintegrated, and the party system has become so much more articulated to concentrated finance, etc. So there may be aspects of the Fordism/post-Fordism type discussion that bear directly on this dimension as well].**

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### 3. Bob Osley-Thomas

Bob Jessop uses employs four dimensions to characterize and compare capitalist states. These include their distinctive economic policies, their distinctive social policies, their primary scale of action, and their primary means to compensate for market failure. He goes on to contrast the Keynesian Welfare National State with the Schumpeterian Competitive State. The Keynesian welfare national stage is characterized as attempting to achieve full employment and economic growth by generating demand. In terms of scale the Keynesian welfare state was essentially national, while in terms of social policies it relied upon collective-bargaining and upon efforts to generate norms of mass consumption.

The competition state is in contrast characterized as the promotion of economic and actual economic conditions that can lead to success in international economic situations. It can be properly described as the new economy and it has a distinctive type of labor process, a distinctive load of macroeconomic growth, and a mode of economic regulation. Its economic policies focus on innovation and competitiveness, and its social policies are subordinated to an expanded notion of economic policy. It operates at a scale of above the nation state and it relies upon self organizing governance to correct market failures.

I'm interested in discussing the contradiction between exchange value and use value. He says that Marx used this contradiction to describe the dynamic of capitalist mode of production. This contradiction can be described as follows: commodities without exchange value would not be produced for sale while commodities without use value would not be purchased. Later in the book on page 108 he argues that in the competitive state the contradiction between exchange and use value contradiction has become more significant. This is in some ways involved with cyberspace. I would like to explore the meaning of this contradiction in more concrete terms and discuss how and why it is more significant in the post-Fordist era. What does the increasing significance of this contradiction tell us about the difference between the Welfare Nation and the Competitive State? **[The pivotal issue here is the problem of space-time compression and how this affects on the one hand the flow of pure financial forms of value and how it affects real production of use-values. Cars are produced in concrete real places by real workers who need to eat. They are located in space. But exchange values flow around the world instantaneously because of ICT technologies and the socio-political institutions that organize**

cyberspace. This spatial/temporal aspect of the exchange value/use value contrast is what is new, I think. It is also what may make the contradictions unleashed by these new configurations harder to regulate or contain, although this may not actually be true – this could simply be because the trial-and-error process of countering these contradictions has yet to hit on the new institutional configurations.]

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#### 4. João Alexandre Peschanski

I would like to discuss Jessop's methodology, what he calls the "strategic-relational approach" to the state. As far as I understand what he is saying, that approach would be at the same time structural and agency-oriented (FCS, p. 40). On one hand, that approach rests upon the somewhat uncontroversial claim that structures constrain actions, and that actors take into considerations such constraints in the process of developing strategies. On another hand, that approach rests upon an idea that I have a harder time to really understand: the idea that structures would have some sort of agent-like characteristics, such as the **capacity of selecting strategies and actions given the structure's own dynamics**. **[You have indeed hit upon a critical phrase: "the capacity of selecting strategies." I don't think, however, that the word "capacity" here implies that the structures are a kind of quasi-subject. I think what this means is that instead of simply saying that structures *constrain* strategies it is better to see structures as making some strategies very hard to pursue, and others easy – there is a kind of gradient of facilitations and impediments to actions of different sorts (i.e. different kinds of strategies of different types of actors) generated by structures. The "selectivity" means that there are facilitations and barriers that are systematic – biased in Offe's terms – around different categories of actors and strategies. A well-articulated, *coherent* system (which is never guaranteed and even when it occurs, never permanent) is one where the exclusions and facilitations of different subsystems and organizations/apparatuses fit together, reinforce each other, complement each other, etc.]** As a point of clarification, could we discuss what Jessop means by that "strategic-relational approach?" I am especially intrigued by Table 1.3 (FCS, p. 35), in which he compares orthodox Marxist arguments and his methodology.

*How well does Jessop follow his own methodological standpoint?* When I read his account of welfare policies in the KWNS, I have the impression that it is mostly a functionalist account: given the specific dynamics of accumulation in the postwar period, it was functional for the economic system and the state project to promote welfare policies. I think I could say the same about the "functional need" of workfare in the SWPR. **[There is always a tendency for the kind of configurational structural analysis adopted to *sound* functionalist, since when a regime achieves "coherence" it does function well. Also, from an expositional point of view there is a natural tendency (which may even be a good thing) to lay out the logic of the coherent condition as an ideal type, much like rational choice theory assumes perfect rationality, and this reinforces the functionalism of the models. But Jessop is pretty insistent that this is always provisional, uneven, and temporary.]**

Jessop made some changes in his definition of the state from the 1990 piece to FCS: *what is at stake in those changes?* In 1990, he defined the state as: "a distinct ensemble of institutions and organizations whose socially accepted function is to define and enforce collectively binding decisions on the members of a society in the name of their common interest or general will" (341); in 2002, he wrote: "the state can be defined as a relatively unified ensemble of socially embedded, socially regularized, and strategically selective institutions, organizations, social forces and activities organized around (or at least

involved in) making collectively binding decisions for an imagined political community" (40). There are many elements that we could compare, such as the emphasis on the relative unity of the state in the 2002 definition and the shift from "common interest or general will" to "imagined political community;" the inclusion of the word "strategically"; the exclusion of the idea of "accepted function," which takes from the definition of the state the notion of legitimacy. **[This is a nice parsing of shifts in the definitions. I am not sure that there is a whole lot that is really in play here, since the pivot is the idea of "collectively binding decisions". The other terms have more to do with the theoretical context of the different discussions. "Imagined political community" and "common interest or general will" are tapping into very much the same ideological terrain.]**

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## 5. Matt Kearney

Bob Jessop outlines a "four-dimensional analysis" of the capitalist state. He uses this theory, which is part typology and part functional system, to analyze the capitalist state and how it is changing. To be really brief, the first dimension is economic policy, the second is social policy, and the third is how economic and social policy work together. The fourth is everything else; it's "the chief mechanism, if any, for supplementing market forces in facilitating capitalist profitability and reproducing labour-power. ... The state is just one among several mechanisms through which attempts are made to overcome market failures and inadequacies" (54). I think this is a residual category. To maximize explanatory power, structural theories like this should try not to have residual categories. I would prefer a definition of the fourth dimension with positively stated content; I want to know what it is, not what it isn't. It might turn out that it is several different things that can be categorized together, or that need to be categorized separately. Elaborating on this would tell us much more about what factors effect the capitalist state's development, so we might end up with a better analysis of this development. **[I agree with you that Jessop is not very clear in this specific part of the exposition, but this is also a synoptic statement in the concluding remarks of a chapter, rather than the place where he does provide more systematic and extended elaborations of conceptual distinctions. One of the things which makes part of this book a bit hard to read, I think, is that lack of clear, transparent correspondence between the lists of points, typologies and distinctions in different parts of the exposition. Thus, section 4 in this chapter is about spatial fixes, which corresponds to the third dimension referred to in these "concluding remarks", and section 5 is about governance and metagovernance, so one might have thought that this would correspond to the fourth dimension discussed in the conclusion, but the fourth dimension is introduced as "mechanisms supplementing market forces" and only in passing is the word "governance" mentioned. If he had labeled this fourth dimension the same way he did in the earlier section, then I don't think you would have seen this as a residual category.]**

Chapter 6 is about substantive examples of fourth-dimensional issues, but Jessop is still missing a positive analytical characterization. Can we pull out of Jessop or other sources a better definition of the fourth dimension? If so, how does that definition enhance or alter what he says substantively about the capitalist state's future? In summary, my question is: what's really going on in the fourth dimension?

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## 6. Michael Billeaux

I have two questions about Jessop's arguments in "The Future of the Capitalist State." Both are about the theoretical orientation laid out in the beginning of the book and how it relates to arguments made throughout the later analysis. The first is about the concept of ecological dominance and the role of the capitalist economy with respect to the determination of state organization and/or action. The second is about the strategic aspect of the state and the role of discourses.

It's not obvious what Jessop means to argue about the role of the capitalist economy. He very clearly argues that it maintains ecological dominance (and indeed, that its ecological dominance grows with the transition to the knowledge-based economy), but at the same time engages in an enthusiastic avoidance ritual with any argument which could be construed as deterministic. As a result, he spends a great deal of time emphasizing the autonomous logic (with respect to the capitalist economy) of other social systems. Yet, taking chapter 3 (esp p104-13 and 123-32) as an example, much of the analysis takes a tone more congruent with the ecological dominance position, or even a stronger determinist one. Throughout this part of the book he makes repeated reference to what the state "must" do, without reference to *why* the state should be bothered with it at all. To me, this is one of the best parts of the book; he identifies the new contradictions generated in the accumulation process in knowledge-based economies and names a number of concrete tasks that the emergent Schumpeterian competition state undertakes in order to maintain conditions for accumulation. Ecological dominance would seem to impute the capitalist economy with some force of determination of other systems in the environment, but he seems hesitant to go there. The ecological dominance position also enables a number of answers to the question of why the state should be concerned with capital accumulation, why state actors should be motivated to generate certain types of strategies, etc. **[I think you are right to focus on the idea of ecological dominance as a source of tension in Jessop's argument. This is a chronic and difficult issue in all theoretical frameworks that want to avoid the kind of deterministic reductionism that obliterates complexity and yet also wants to maintain a fairly strong sense of systems within which we can say more than everything-affects-everything. Jessop writes that "Ecological dominance refers to the structural and/or strategic capacity of a given system in a self-organizing ecology of systems to imprint its developmental logic on other systems' operation far more than these systems are able to impose their respective logics on that system." The attribution of causal asymmetry here with the expression "far more than" opens a huge can of worms (which has bedeviled my work as well, eg. When I talk about structural hybrids in which capitalism is dominant), since it is so difficult to really nail down the implicit metric behind this quantitative judgment about relative causal power. I think in the end one needs to read this kind of text with a certain degree of tolerance for slippage. The strong anti-determinist rhetoric is a way of sharply distinguishing the analysis from reductionist arguments; the ecological dominance argument is a way of distinguishing it from post-modern anti-causal indeterminacy. These two rhetorical battles end up being in some tension in some arguments. I guess in this case the resolution is that that the ecological dominance argument means that the state really must do something in response to these imperatives in the sense that given the nature of the overall system if it does nothing than the pressures, disruptions, contradictions will intensify making the reproduction of the state as it is ever more in jeopardy, but what it must do is not pre-given by the imperatives themselves. In this reading, then, there is a kind of deterministic account of the pressures – these are real and systematically generated by the functioning of the system – but not of the response to the pressures.]**

There is a similar incongruity between his reference to the centrality of state strategy on the one hand, and on the other the importance of trial-and-error, accidental, shot-in-the-dark approaches to state activity by state actors. "Strategy" may be a charitable term for this sort of thing. The only elaboration

on strategic action I was able to pick up is that it is informed by dominant discourses; for example, the boundaries of the economy as a subject of state regulation are discursively constituted. This may be so, but it would also be worth elaborating the changing way in which the capitalist economy leaves its “ecological imprint” in the blocking or enabling of state strategies, say, as it makes the transition from Fordist to knowledge-based accumulation regimes.

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## 7. Paul Pryse

On first reading, Jessop’s argument about the transition to a Schumpeterian Workfare Postnational Regime seems like a fairly orthodox base-superstructure argument. When Jessop is making his case against determinism early on and says the economy is not determining “in the last instance”, he seems to be arguing with historical materialism as filtered through Althusser, with whom I believe the above phrase is most closely associated. In his account, the economic crisis of the seventies, characterized by the onset of stagflation, led to a crisis in the Keynesian Welfare state, which forced state managers to reconfigure the state to promote accumulation in a different way. In turn, other spheres of society generally considered part of the superstructure were transformed by this change. For example, Jessop discusses how education under post-Fordism became better suited to preparing workers for the labor market, with more resources for vocational training and other changes. How different is Jessop’s approach from earlier Marxist models of the relationship between the economy and “superstructural” institutions? **[I think this is a theme we should pursue with Jessop when we talk to him. Michael Billeaux raises much the same issue with his question about ecological dominance. Early on in the book Jessop formulates the problem of economic determinism in a way which is completely different from the way G.A. Cohen defends economic determinism. Jessop writes that the relations of production could play the “determining role” in explaining noneconomic structures only “if they were wholly self-contained and self-reproducing and thus operated as a cause without a cause.” Cohen argues, in contrast, that it is precisely because the economic structure is not self-reproducing that it explains the superstructure: this is what a functional explanation accomplishes (in Cohen’s argument). The process by which the functional relation is established will in general be some kind of haphazard trial and error process (analogous, if only weakly, to the trial-and-error of functional explanations in biology – i.e. random mutations with natural selection), and there is no reason for the functional fit to be perfect, seamless and unique – there may be more than one structural solution to a functional problem, and any solution may be just barely good enough to reduce the pressure for additional institutional change. I agree with you that this is in fact very close to the sophisticated version of the Base/Superstructure model. (In addition there is also the point made by Cohen about restrictive vs inclusive B/S models – Jessop is certainly pointing towards a restrictive version). I am not sure why Jessop ignores the Cohen-type account of economic determinism via properly constructed functional explanations, since these allow for contradictions and messiness and do seem rather like his actual empirical analysis.]**

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## 8. Sarah Stefanos

I found Jessop's *The Future of the Capitalist State* a particularly lucid, complex and enjoyable thought experiment on the crisis of the Atlantic Fordism and what direction capitalism might take. Yet despite Jessop's careful groundwork to steadily make the claim for the emergence of Schumpeterian Workfare Postnational Regimes (SWPR), I was a bit taken aback. I suppose I was expecting Jessop to lay the foundation for a more humane, ecologically-sustainable type of capitalism than that which emerges in his SWPR model. My initial disappointment with the SWPR model has yielded, however, to a general appreciation for its prescience. **[Of course, Jessop is not making a normative argument about the desirability of the SWPT, but rather of the likely emergence of such a solution to the crisis-ridden, unsustainable character of the previous form of the capitalist state.]**

Even though Jessop's SWPR model incorporates the "postnational" regime, I liked Jessop's general tendency to promote the "non-erosion" of the national state. He states that "the erosion of one form of the national state should not be mistake for its general retreat" and that " 'denationalization should be seen as a partial and uneven process that leaves a rearticulated 'national state' still exercising the generic (political) function of the capitalist type of state" (212). I wonder what Jessop would have to say now (nearly 10 years after the publication of his book) about the national state's struggle for management of internationalization and what kind of role the state takes in an era of (re)-commodification of tangible resources like land. (This is in view of the global financial crisis and "invisible" commodities.) **[I know that Jessop has been rethinking some of the positions from this book, so this would be a good issue to pose to him.]** In turn, what might commodification of nature in 2011 mean for processes of territorialization, de-territorialization and re-territorialization to which Jessop alluded early in his book (19)? **[You don't explicitly mention global warming, but your comment on the commodification of nature suggests that this might be one of the issues you are touching on. The environmental crisis posed by Global Warming seems like a massively novel problem for states to cope with, because of the territorial mismatch between the scope of the problem, the causal sources that produce it, and kinds of remedies being sought. Regardless of the role specifically of capitalism in generating the problem, even in the absence of capitalism so long as states remained national territorial states, there would be a mismatch and a difficult collective action problem to be solved. While I think in a socialist economy it might be a bit easier to solve the problem, any plausible socialism for a very long time into the future would need territorially-based states, and if they were deeply democratic and accountable to their citizens, then there would be the problem of the global unevenness in the costs of remediation, the sacrifices needed to solve the problem, the coordination of costs, and so on. Capitalism makes all of this more difficult, but I am not sure that a postcapitalist state would find the problem tractable.]**

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## 9. Chris Carlson

I found Jessop's account of the crises and transitions between accumulation regimes to be much more compelling than his theory of the capitalist state. Perhaps I'm simply not very tuned into the state theory terminology, but I found his basic theory of the capitalist state to be so abstract and all-inclusive that it seems to lack explanatory power. "State power reflects the prevailing balance of forces," but it isn't clear exactly how that occurs. Jessop lists four general mechanisms that create this situation (economic determination, ecological dominance, economic dominance, bourgeois hegemony), but these are also fairly abstract and seem to combine both elements of instrumentalism and structuralism as well



as analysis of the specific state form. At times it seems that Jessop is more concerned with making sure his theory is invulnerable to any possible shortcomings than making sure it actually contributes to an understanding of why the state functions as it does.

I found his account of the contradictions of the welfare state and the transition towards neoliberalism to be much more useful. **[But doesn't the account of contradiction depend on the prior account of structural configurations and functions? I agree that in places the level of abstraction might make it hard to see this, but each of those core abstract concepts defines a way of diagnosing aspects of the state's articulation to other subsystems and its internal functioning, and this is what provides a focus for the account of disarticulation and dysfunction.]** I am particularly interested in the explanation of how wages came to be more an international cost of production rather than a source of domestic demand thus creating pressure for a reorganization of the accumulation regime. **[In a way the issue here is not actually "rather than" a source of demand, for in a world where wages are experienced as a cost they are still also a source of demand. The issue here, I think, is the way wages impact the strategies of capitalists more than the system as a whole: in terms of competitive pressures on at least a certain fraction of capital, wage-as-cost becomes a more central determinant of their success or failure. When economies are largely national and relatively closed and not exposed to international competition, and if wages are fairly regulated domestically so all capitalists face the same wage structure more or less, then they cease to affect individual capitalist's competitive capacity. They can still affect overall profit levels (via the rate of exploitation in the system as a whole), but they don't affect individual capitalist success. The system-as-a-whole problem can then be managed by pegging wage costs to productivity increase.]** One of the questions this brings up is how capitalists were able to overcome the need to create demand through wages, and how capitalists will resolve this problem in the future when the current "spatio-temporal fix" has run its course. I am still reading the final chapters of the book, so perhaps Jessop answers these questions?

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## 10. Taylan Acar

Jessop talks a lot about complex trial-and-error processes in terms of the transformation from the KNWS to SWPR. How are the mechanisms of the trial-and-error processes? I am a little confused about this process. To me it seems that in fact most countries implement similar to each other contingent upon their comparative advantages etc. This understanding also disregards the political aspect of the decisions made in terms of switch to a different economic model, which later manifested itself as neoliberalism. I think his analysis misses the political agenda in the passage from the Keynesian to Schumpeterian state, and how the wider implications and policy-making took place. **[The trial and error process occurs when there is a search for a new institutional configuration to solve unmanageable problems. This is not the only process at work, however. There is also copying (tendencies towards institutional isomorphism) of successful models. There is also strategies that smash first build later such as shock therapy in the Soviet Union. One might think of neoliberalism in the West this way, if we see the central objective of neoliberalism in its initial phase is to destroy the old institutional model and only later worry about building a new one. Sometimes this is referred to as the rollback/rollout phases of neoliberalism. Politically the current impasse, especially in the US, is that the market fundamentalism of neoliberalism has taken such ideological hold that it seems to be blocking the trial-and-error process of building new institutions.]**

Was the transformation from KNWS to SWPR simply a result of a technocratic exploration for a better functioning economic model given the contradictions of KNWS or did it also involve a political, social, as well as cultural transformation of society, besides the purely economic implications?

In relation to this, the deregulation policies are imposed by the supranational organizations like WTO. How do the “global governance” structures fit into his model of transformation?

What is the benefit of treating labor, and land and money as a non-commodity? **[The expression is really “fictitious” commodity rather than “noncommodity” – i.e. they are no produced in a commodified way even if they are used and exchanged in a commodified form.]** Does it really matter, what labor “actually” is, as long as it is treated as a commodity under the capitalist mode of production? **[The point is that labor is NOT fully “treated” as a commodity since it is not produced for profit on a market, and this means that the conditions of its production require the effective functioning of nonmarket mechanisms.]** More importantly, is there a qualitative difference between the KNWS and SWPR in terms of treating labor as a commodity? Without attempting to answer this question, I do not see the benefit of the underscore “actually labor is not a commodity.” This would also help to create a political agenda for decommodification of labor: transforming it from a weak tie between two actors to a one, which is thickened by extra threads such as health care, unemployment benefits, skill acquisition etc. Polanyi argued –and in 1944- that these three are “fictitious commodities.” However as an economic anthropologist, he revealed the process, how they became commodified at a certain point of capitalist development.

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## 11. Yotaro Natani

The following are different ways of asking the same question, in reaction to Jessop: where do the concepts of class struggle and class domination fall in Jessop’s framework? What is the role of class struggle in transitioning from the Keynesian welfare national state to the Schumpeterian workfare postnational regime? I ask these questions because I think Jessop does not spell this out very explicitly or precisely. Jessop says that the state is not a subject, but is a socially embedded institution/organization that makes collective binding decisions; state power is exercised through the state institutions. The state form and power, then, should **reflect** the underlying class relations. **[Not quite: state forms and state power “reflect” to a varying degree the effects of all sorts of social relations, not just class relations. When there is ecological dominance of capitalism – when you get bourgeois societalization – then one can say that the state overall reflects class relations more than any other kind of relations. That is what ecological dominance means. But even then the state will also reflect all sorts of other relations and “condense” all sorts of struggles, other than class struggles, including relations and struggles involving actors internal to the state. Those relations, actors, actions and strugglers are just as real and produce effects just like class relations, actors and struggles.]** We can agree that the capitalist class is the dominant class under both KWNS and SWPR because in both cases the state is acting as a collective capitalist by trying to secure the conditions of capital accumulation (despite running into contradictions). **But, for Jessop, the extent to which “trying to secure the conditions of capital accumulation” is the preemptive, dominant preoccupation of the state is not given simply by the fact that the state exists in a capitalist society. When there is bourgeois societalization, then this is the case. In other cases capital accumulation take place and the state facilitates it in general, but not as a dominant necessarily overriding preoccupation. The more the state actually takes the form of the capitalist state – that is, these formal attributes become fully**

**realized in its structures – then the more likely it is that capitalism will also be ecologically dominant, etc.]** But the transition from KWNS to SWPR is just as much a political move as an economic one, and we could have heard more about the class struggles that led to that unique trajectory of post-Fordism. For example, the SWPR is a kind of state set up in response to the globalizing postindustrial knowledge economy, growing out of the previous Fordist industrial economy. Under a knowledge economy, new classes of workers – mainly skilled and intellectual – occupy an important place in the process of economic growth and capital accumulation; what kind of class compromise (positive or negative) was reached between the capitalists, the skilled (postindustrial) workers class, and the industrial working class, such that capitalist state was able to deemphasize welfare for workfare, etc.? At the very end of the book, Jessop claims that the move toward SWPR was a way of dealing with the contradiction between capital accumulation and social reproduction which the KWNS could no longer handle, but that the SWPR may also be inadequate in the future as well. In such a case, the kind of class struggle between capitalists and workers that takes place in such crisis moments would seem to impact what new direction that capitalist state would pursue next.

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## 12. Mitch Schwartz

I'm not convinced by Jessop's argument regarding the continuing importance of the national state. The concept of a national state seems in conflict with both the globalized economic system and the identities of citizens of late-capitalist societies. Transnational economies and postnational citizens fit a network structure, but the hierarchical structure of the national state doesn't really fit the network model. **[However: the problem of binding rules enforced over people remains almost entirely territorialized in a way connected to the national state. I think the idea here is that states remain largely national even if it is the case that stateness overall may be eroding insofar as it may become increasingly difficult to create binding rules enforced on people.]**

Of course, Jessop acknowledges that the nature of the national state is changing. And I agree that the national state does still serve functions of social cohesion and managing social conflict. But the perseverance of isolated national states is in tension with network trends in the economic and public spheres. Am I correct in interpreting Jessop as saying that relatively autonomous national states will persist? If so, how should we address the paradox of non-networked national states operating within a networked economic structure and governing networked citizens, neither of which exist solely within national boundaries? **[One issue is whether there will emerge network forms of enforcing binding rules globally that are not themselves backed by states. Perhaps there will be forms of rule-enforcement that matter and which track persons-in-neorks rather than persons within territories. Wikipedia, after all, has enforcement rules which seem to sort of work in its small domain of activities. It is hard to see this as effectively regulating global economic activities in a way that would serve as a basis for reproducing the conditions of accumulation, countering crisis tendencies, etc. The idea that this could happen through the networks themselves sounds a lot like the myth of the self-regulating market.]**

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## INTERROGATIONS ON “PUTTING STATES IN THEIR PLACE”

### 13. Ayça Zayim

Influenced by Poulantzas, Jessop sees the state as a social relation whereby “the exercise of state power involves a form-determined condensation of the changing balance of forces” (p.40). Furthermore, defining the state as “a relative unified ensemble of institutions” with its own institutional rules, operating procedures and priorities that are distinct, yet “structurally coupled” with the capitalist mode of production, Jessop makes an important contribution. This conceptualization of the state opens the possibility to investigate the ways in which the capitalist state may actually disturb capital accumulation rather than maintain or enhance it. Hence, his framework enables him to supersede instrumentalist and functionalist explanations.

Despite this important contribution, there are two issues I would like to discuss/raise. The first one pertains to what I find to be a contradiction in his definition of the state. Jessop defines the state as “a distinct assemble of institutions and organizations whose *socially accepted function is to define and enforce collectively binding decision on the members of a society in the name of their common interest or general will*” (p.341, emphasis added). Hence, the state is defined by the representation of the common interest or what one can further characterize as having legitimacy. **[Note that in the quote all that is said that that the binding rules are “in the name of the common interest” not that the state actually represents the common interest.]** However, does not this definition really describe the modern state under capitalism (or more specifically bourgeois democracy) where the state becomes ‘impersonal’ (p.349)? Does Jessop assume the very thing he needs to explain? I am skeptical that the feudal state could be characterized by the ‘general will’. He counts feudal state as one type of state. However, later on, he confusingly questions the ‘stateness’ of “traditional states” based on his discussion of ‘state discourse’. I really cannot figure out in what ways the state discourse argument contributes to his broader argument. Furthermore, I believe it complicates one of his important points, mainly that the types of state which are not “formally adequate” to a particular mode of production could still be compatible with it. Herein, are we talking about forms of state (feudal, capitalist etc.) – which would only be consistent if we accept feudal state as a type of state- or specific features of the capitalist state (p.355)? **[I think you have identified a tension between two theoretical ideas: one is that there is a very abstract concept of the state which applies to all possible states and the other is that what we conventionally call “states” actually vary in the degree of their “stateness”. This is a similar issue in Weber, where the parcellized sovereignty of the feudal state and the lack of any kind of real centralized monopoly of the legitimate use of force means that feudal states were often really quasi-states, or states with lower levels of stateness, etc. I don’t think a lot rides of this, frankly. The pivot remains “collectively binding decisions” (or rules). That is the bottom line of what makes states states. The part about “in the name of common interests” adds a specification of one of the key things that makes possible the reproduction of the capacity to make collectively binding decisions – namely legitimacy in one sense or another. Whether than is included in the very definition of the state or in the elaboration of its conditions of existence is not so crucial.]**

Secondly, Jessop argues against orthodox Marxist accounts that treat the economic sphere as the determinant “in the last instance” (p.34). He contends that “even where a formally adequate type of state does not exist, a favorable balance of forces or even simple ‘muddling through’ can often provide sufficient compensation” (p.344). His argument is compelling; however, his theory of the state really seems to engage with –and, I would say, even build upon– the state under capitalism. Hence, I am curious to what extent we can argue that these ‘favorable balance of forces’ would ‘provide sufficient

compensation' under different modes of production? Withstanding the fact that capitalism needs the state for its survival; it is still true that it distinctively rests upon the distinction between the political and economic spheres (the domain of capital accumulation)—hence, is there more 'degrees of freedom' for the state action/policies? Therefore, could this 'flexibility' or 'malleability' that is described by Jessop be explained by the very nature of capitalism rather than being equally applicable to other modes of production? **["Muddling through" can be part of an economic deterministic model of the state in the weak functionalist sense, for it remains the case that not all forms of the state would even allow the dominant class forces to muddle through. If the theory postulates that there are systematic reasons to expect states that block muddling through to be transformed by the dominant forces, then you are back to some kind of weak economic determination in the "last instance" (where "last instance" invokes some kind of functional explanation of the trial-and-error sort).]**

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#### 14. Kathryn Anderson

Interrogation of: Bob Jessop, "Putting States in their Place," pp.338-369 in Bob Jessop, *State Theory: putting capitalist states in their place* (Penn State University Press, 1990).

On page 353, Jessop asks, "Is the State Capitalist?"

He begins his answer with the non-committal, "The state is a strategically selective terrain which can never be neutral among all social forces and political projects; but any bias is always tendential and can be undermined or reinforced by appropriate strategies."

To me, this sounds instrumentalist. "...the outcome of state power also depends on the changing balance of forces engaged in political action both within and beyond the state."

Finally, "state power is capitalist to the extent that it creates, maintains or restores the conditions required for capital accumulation in a given situation" (p 354).

**My question is about accumulation. When the authors we are reading in this course talk about accumulation, do they all mean the same thing? How much does accumulation mean concentration? Or concentrated accumulation? How much could it be just a reference to aggregate accumulation? [Capital accumulation as a general theoretical concept does not refer to concentration of capital, although it may well lead to concentration depending upon the nature of the economic context. All that is referred to here is the process by which profits are reinvested in ways that lead to the continual aggregate expansion of capital. This need not mean the endless growth in the size of firms. But it means that profits are not just consumed by the owners of the means of production, nor simply used to replace depreciated capital in existing means of production, but invested in order to grow.]**

Take Cuba, China, the U.S., and Sweden: Cuba is defensibly not capitalist. In Cuba, there is very little accumulation. I'm not sure how capitalist China has been at different recent historical moments. There has definitely been consistent accumulation in China since the Communist Revolution, but we can debate how concentrated it is. The U.S. has always been capitalist and has always accumulated, though the accumulation has gone through periods of more or less concentration. Sweden is a capitalist social democracy, but accumulation is partially distributed, not totally concentrated. **[Think of the issue this way: When economic growth – growth in GDP – takes the form of increasing value of the economic assets deployed in production, then there is accumulation. When these assets are themselves bought and sold as capital, then the accumulation is capital accumulation. In China this is, today, unequivocally capital accumulation.]**

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### 15. Alex Hanna

One of the more interesting parts of the Jessop's work is his focus on forms of the interaction between the capitalist economy and the state. His attempt to develop an ecological account of the relationship between the economy and the state is, I think, a fruitful one, but one which is left less than developed. In the article, he defines the concept *structural coupling* as the “the co-evolution of autonomous structures which share at least in part the same social space.” Using this notion, the interaction of the economy and state naturally takes on a relational character, but what is the nature of this relationship? It's not voluntarist, in the same way Therborn critiques “power elite” theories of the state. But what aspects of the state itself interact with what parts of the economy. If we are to visualize it as a network dyad, what does that edge mean? **[A lot of this is elaborated in the book. I think the key thing to keep in mind here is the idea that both the state and the economy are systems with self-organizing features – i.e. with complex structures of relations that shape and facilitate the practices of people within those systems in such a way as to rend the interconnections systematic rather than haphazard – and that as an abstract proposition they mutually affect each other and co-evolve (or co-develop) in response both to their interactive effects and their own internal dynamics. That is the most abstract formulation. Asymmetries get introduced through ideas such as “ecological dominance”, but also through the strategies of actors acting on these systemic interconnections. It is not just random mutations and adaptations, but strategy shapes the coupled co-evolution. The elaborations in the book then specify what aspects of the state and economy are most central to all of this complexity.]**

As an aside, in last week's debate on Therborn in which we talked about Althusser, there was some confusion between theories of the “power elite” and voluntarist theories of the control of capital, and theories of Marxist humanists. The latter ascribe the control and use of capital to the capitalist and his cronies, while the latter attempts to describe working-class agency and social movement-based change. Althusser seems to reject all attempts at agency, whether from the top or bottom, but Marxist humanist theorists deal with the latter and probably would be sympathetic to the former.

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