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PUTTING STATES IN THEIR PLACE: ONCE MORE ON CAPITALIST STATES AND CAPITALIST SOCIETIES

After its initial postwar neglect under American intellectual hegemony, the state re-entered the social scientific mainstream some 20 years ago.¹ Efforts to theorize the state soon proliferated once the state came out of the closet and empirical research multiplied on specific aspects of the state apparatus and state power.² The Miliband-Poulantzas debate played a key role in stimulating this interest in the anglophone world but many other currents, American as well as European, fed into the same theoretical stream. Moreover, if attempts to 'bring the state back in' during the 1970s were largely associated with Marxists, it is mainly macro-sociologists and orthodox political scientists who are now in the vanguard. The reasons for this shift are too complex to be examined here and the available space is even too limited for a general critique of the main approaches to the state currently on offer. We have reviewed many of these attempts in preceding chapters and there is no point at this late stage in the book to repeat that exercise. Instead I will focus on six key issues in recent theorizing about the state. The first is the nature of the state as a theoretical object; the second concerns the relations among the idea of the state, state projects and state formation; the third is the character of the 'capitalist state'; the fourth involves the paradoxical relation between the state and society; the fifth, their mediations; and the sixth is the agenda for future research in state theory. These issues are closely interrelated and the same general theoretical approach is adopted for each.

What is the State?

This innocuous-looking question is the first and the most fundamental problem facing all theories of the state. Posed in its most radical form, indeed, it threatens the integrity of any project to develop a theory of the state. This is the startlingly blunt question: does the state exist? Assuming for the moment some sort of affirmative answer is justified, one could still argue that this need not imply that the state is a valid object of theoretical enquiry. Thus some system theorists still argue that the state should be abandoned as a topic of research since it produces vapid debates and a conceptual morass (e.g. Easton 1981: 321-2; and, for a counter-critique, Hoffman 1988: 26-8). The balance of opinion still favours the view that the state both exists and is also a valid focus of research but, beyond this, the conceptual swamp that Easton predicted continues.

Among the many questions which provoke debate (vapid or not) are the following sets. Is the state itself best defined by its legal form, its coercive capacities, its institutional composition and boundaries, its internal operations and modes of calculation, its declared aims, its functions for the broader society or its sovereign place in the international system? Is it a thing, a subject, a social relation, or simply a construct which helps to orientate political action? Is stateness a variable and, if so, what are its central dimensions? What is the relationship between the state and law, the state and politics, the state and civil society, the public and the private, state power and micro-power relations? Can the state be studied on its own; should it be studied as part of the political system; or, indeed, can it only be understood in terms of a more general social theory? Does the state have any autonomy and, if so, what are its sources and limits? Answers to such questions can clearly vary from one set to another but viewing the state as a social relation provides a relatively coherent solution to most of them.

The Complexities of the State and State Theory

As already indicated there is little agreement on how to define the state. Among the many reasons for this, two merit discussion here. First, any actually existing state comprises a more or less distinct ensemble of multifunctional institutions and organizations which have at best a partial, provisional and unstable political identity and operational unity and which involve a complex over-determined dynamic. Thus differences can legitimately arise as to which particular features are treated as primary or definitive and which as secondary or contingent. Secondly, discounting the complexities of states themselves, differences also arise because the concept of the state has a central role in political life

itself. This holds not only for disputes about the boundaries, purposes and limits of any given state but also for processes of state-building and reorganization intended to transform that state. This suggests that the concept is not just essentially contested³ but also that dominant conceptions can influence the nature of the state itself. This is why some commentators even doubt whether, in the absence of a developed concept of the state, states can really be said to exist in the UK or the USA (e.g. Nettl 1968; Dyson 1982; Badie and Birnbaum 1983).

In ten of the preceding chapters I have managed to avoid offering my own definition of the state. At most I have referred to it as an ensemble of institutions and then failed to list the different institutions which comprise this ensemble. In my discussion of corporatism, however, it was suggested that the legal distinction between 'public' and 'private' would prove useful in exploring the implications of corporatism for the nature and dynamic of the capitalist state (chapter 3, 117). In this case a definition was needed to facilitate a definite account of these implications and, for other purposes, another definition might have been more appropriate. Thus my suggestion was immediately followed by the qualification that, 'whatever one's choice of definition, it is essential to consider the complex forms of articulation among state institutions and between state and non-state institutions in the overall reproduction of capital accumulation and political domination' (p. 117 above). Elsewhere in this collection I also refer to the capitalist type of state as a form-determined social relation whose most fundamental formal feature is its *particularization*, i.e. its institutional separation from the circuit of capital; and note how its separation permits this type of state to exercise a constitutionalized monopoly of violence.⁴ But this only enables us to identify the most general feature of the capitalist type of state (and *not*, it should be stressed, all states of whatever type in any capitalist social formation) and more detailed accounts would clearly need to specify to an appropriate degree a given state's particular forms of political representation, governmental intervention and overall articulation as an institutional ensemble (chapters 5, 161; and 7, 206). Finally, as I have noted at several points, an account of the state which only considered its institutional forms would be incomplete. For this must be complemented by an analysis of substantive aspects such as its social bases, state projects or national-popular objectives (see chapters 5, 7 and 9).

Why have I been so reluctant to define the state? There must be a reason and, indeed, there is. States are not the sort of abstract, formal object which readily lend themselves to a clear-cut, unambiguous definition. Nor are they suited as the starting point of a general theory of politics or societalization. In the terms used by Marx in his methodological remarks intended to introduce his readers to *Capital*, the state is a 'real-concrete' object. It is formed through 'the concrete synthesis of multiple determinations' (Marx 1857; 100). Thus it is not a proper job for state theorists to offer a definition which specifies once and for

all the abstract, formal characteristics of the state. Instead it is their task gradually to build up an understanding of the state as a form-determined social relation through a steady spiral movement from abstract to concrete and from simple to complex. Inevitably this movement can never be completed: it would always be possible to make any account more concrete and more complex. And, as this progressive movement towards an analysis of the state which is ever richer in theoretical determinations proceeds, previous assumptions, principles and concepts will be continually redefined. Not even one's most abstract conceptual starting points remain unmodified in the movement from an abstract, simple account of the state to a concrete, complex analysis.

Defining the State

Some readers may simply reject this general line of argument or, if not that, at least be worried that it calls into question the scientific validity of attempts to develop 'state theory'. There is an element of justification in such worries in so far as a theoretically sound account of the state must deal with far more than the state as an institutional ensemble (see below). But this is by no means an insuperable problem even it involves several difficulties on the way to solving it. Rather than break off at this juncture and turn to other issues, however, I will now, for the sake of further argument, offer a general definition of the state. Then, by exploring some of its many ramifications, I hope to confirm the plausibility of my own alternative approach to the problem of defining the state.

Any general definition of the state would need to refer to state discourse as well as state institutions. My own suggestion runs as follows. The core of the state apparatus comprises 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. This broad 'cluster'⁵ definition identifies the state in terms of its generic features as a specific form of macro-political organization with a specific type of political orientation; it also establishes clear links between the state and the political sphere and, indeed, the wider society. Thus not all forms of macro-political organization can be classed as statelike nor can the state simply be equated with government, law, bureaucracy, a coercive apparatus or another political institution. Indeed this definition puts the contradictions and dilemmas necessarily involved in political discourse at the heart of work on the state (cf. Hoffman 1988). This is because claims about the general will or common interest are a key feature of the state system and distinguish it from straightforward political domination or violent oppression. At the same time adopting such an approach could serve as a basis for describing specific states

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and political regimes as well as for exploring the conditions in which states emerge, evolve, enter into crisis and are transformed.

This said, six qualifications are required if this definition is to be useful in organizing research:

- 1 Above, around and below the core of the state are found institutions and organizations whose relation to the core ensemble is uncertain. States never achieve full closure or complete separation from society and their precise boundaries are usually in doubt. Their operations also depend on a wide range of micro-political practices dispersed throughout society but concentrated and condensed in the core of the state. And they also enter into links with emergent state-like institutions above the nation-state at an inter-state level.
- 2 The nature of these institutions and organizations, their articulation to form the ensemble and their links with the wider society will depend on the nature of the social formation and its past history. The capitalist type of state will differ from the feudal type, for example;⁶ and, in addition, the form of regime will differ from one capitalist society to another. There is nothing controversial here, of course, since such distinctions are the stuff of comparative government.
- 3 Although the socially acknowledged character of its political functions for society is a defining feature of the normal state, the forms in which this legitimacy is institutionalized and expressed will also vary. Indeed the whole point of describing such political functions as 'socially acknowledged' is to stress that their precise content is constituted in and through politically relevant discourses. Even in single states they can be multiple and even mutually contradictory.⁷
- 4 Although coercion is the state's ultimate sanction, it has other methods of enforcement which it can employ. Violence is rarely the first resort of the state and in many cases it would prove counter-productive. A full account of the state must consider all the means of intervention at its disposal and the contradictions and dilemmas which they involve.
- 5 The society whose common interest and general will are administered by the state should no more be interpreted as an empirical given than the state. The boundaries and identity of the society are often constituted in and through the same processes by which states are built, reproduced and transformed. Indeed it is one of the more obvious conclusions of the state-centred approach that state- and nation-building are strongly influenced by the emergent dynamic of the emergent international system formed through the interaction of sovereign states.
- 6 Lastly, whatever the political rhetoric of the common interest or general will might suggest, these are always 'illusory' in so far as any attempt to define them occurs on a strategically selective terrain and involves the differential articulation and aggregation of interests, opinions and values. Indeed, as already noted in several earlier chapters, the common interest or general will is always asymmetrical, marginalizing or defining some interests at the same time as it privileges other. There is never a general interest which embraces all possible particular interests (cf. Jessop 1983b and chapter 5 above).

Exploring the implications of this general definition indicates the problems

involved in starting any account of the state with a definition which is never subsequently redefined. In turn this calls into question the 'taken for granted' nature of the state and indicates the need for a more critical approach. Even were one to reject this particular definition, others would be equally vulnerable. This is not the best point at which to review the main definitions which have been offered by others (for reviews, see Dowdall 1923; d'Entrèves 1967; Dyson 1982; Luhmann 1986b). But a brief comment on one often cited in the statist literature might be in order.

Recent state-centred theorists often cite Max Weber's celebrated definition of the modern state as 'a human community which (successfully) claims the *monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force* within a given territory' (Weber 1948: 78, parenthesis and emphasis in original; cf. Weber 1968: 54, 65, 909). In this context 'human community' actually refers to the administrative staff of the 'compulsory political organization' which exercises continuous domination within the territory (cf. Weber 1968: 53-4). Immediately after introducing this definition, Weber proceeds to qualify it by noting that force is not the exclusive prerogative of the state (since its use is a defining feature of *all* political organizations); and he adds that states usually resort to means other than force to safeguard their own existence and the general political order within the territories they control. Later he notes that a state, *qua* political community, must be concerned with satisfying more than common economic needs: it must attempt to regulate the interrelations of the inhabitants of the territory in terms of more general values (Weber 1968: 902). He likewise notes that political legitimacy comes to be defined not just in terms of shared values but also in terms of a set of casuistic rules (Weber 1968: 904). In this context the nature and forms of legitimation vary and so do the various functions and activities which states perform on behalf of the community (Weber 1968: 54-6, 905-6). Moreover, what is initially treated as the central defining feature of the modern state (its constitutionalized monopoly in determining the legitimate use of violence) soon disappears from the theoretical horizon. In its place Weber focuses on the nature of bureaucracy and its crucial role in effectuating the unity of the state administration (Weber 1968: 56, 212-26, 956-1003). In short, even this most famous of definitions, once introduced, must be qualified and extended to take account of the actual complexities of real states.

A Conceptual Hierarchy . . .

Regardless of one's initial definition, an adequate account of the state must proceed beyond it. My own suggestion is that we analyse the state on three levels: the forms of its basic institutional separation from the rest of the society whose general interests it is supposed to represent; the nature of its internal organization, modes of political calculation and operating procedures; and the

political practices and discourses in and through which the common interests are articulated and promoted. These three levels correspond to the basic organizing principles of a given social formation, the organizing principles of the state as an institutional ensemble and the actual political struggles which occur within, around and at a distance from the state.⁸

To make this analysis more specific, a hierarchy of concepts can be developed: this would move from the abstract, formal concept of statehood down to ever more highly specified types of political regime. At the most abstract level would come a generic concept of the state as form (*Staat als Form*) which simply establishes the elements of the state in general.⁹ In essence this would refer to the emergence within a community of an institutionalized division of labour between an organization empowered to exercise force in implementing decisions binding on the members of that community and the community in its other modes of existence and activity. When there is no such distinction between a separate administrative staff¹⁰ and those (the public or people) over whom its domination is exercised, then the state cannot be said to exist.¹¹ Proceeding from this definition and operating on the three levels identified above, this hierarchy would provide the means to generate a typology of state forms and/or to specify any given state.

Below the concept of statehood would come different types of state associated with different types of social formation. For example, if social formations are identified in terms of their dominant mode of production (which is, of course, only one way of proceeding), these could include the feudal, absolutist, capitalist and state socialist types of state. These would be *formally adequate* to the relevant mode of production in the sense that their basic institutional forms are consistent with the dominant economic form and the resulting economic dynamic; and they would also be *empirically feasible* in the sense that the historical preconditions for a given type of state can sometimes be found or created. This does not mean that a given type of state will always develop in all societies dominated by the mode of production. For, first, different types of state cannot be bought 'off the shelf' nor can they be substituted at will. And, secondly, even where a *formally adequate* type of state does not exist, a favourable balance of forces or even simple 'muddling through' can often provide sufficient compensation. Conversely, even where an adequate type of state does exist, it can be immobilized or rendered dysfunctional if the balance of forces disrupts its typical modes of operation.

Moreover, if it seems appropriate to periodize social formations, then typical variant historical forms could also be specified. Thus, for capitalist social formations, one might define liberal, monopoly and state monopoly forms.¹² The key variable here would be the specific forms of institutional separation between the state and the circuit of capital which characterize each stage and their implications for the nature and limits of the state's functions. Next would come concepts relating to the normal and exceptional types of state¹³ and their

variant forms. Regarding normal regimes, for example, one would look at the dominant organ of political representation; and, for exceptional regimes, the dominant organ within the administrative system. Thus one might distinguish among different forms of presidential and parliamentary democracies; or, alternatively, fascist, military, police and bureaucratic dictatorships. The next step might then be to differentiate types of regime: possible criteria here are party systems, modes of policy-making and so on. Clearly such a hierarchy gives a much better basis for analysing the state than a single definition.

... or Six Dimensions?

For those who are impatient with conceptual hierarchies and the need to move stepwise towards a concrete, complex analysis, there is an alternative procedure which short-circuits this movement. This will have its costs when dealing with problems such as the ways in which form problematizes function or exploring the limits of state intervention. But for less ambitious purposes it has some merits. The procedure in question is simply to analyse the organizational form and sociopolitical bases of the state. For this task six dimensions seem useful. The first three dimensions are primarily formal or institutional; they correspond to the inputs, withinputs and outputs of the state. These are relatively unproblematic and can be introduced immediately:

- 1 Its various forms of representation and their articulation into a representational regime; among the relevant forms of representation we can include territorial and functional representation, pluralism, clientelism, *raison d'état*, and populism. Also relevant here would be the roles played by political parties, various types of corporatist body, social movements and state managers.
- 2 Its internal organization expressed through the distribution of powers among different parts of the state system considered both territorially and functionally; in addition to the obvious issue of the relative weight of the legislative and executive branches of government, it is also important to investigate the relative weight of different parts of the administrative apparatus, the role of law and money in its internal organization and the form and extent of its administrative unity. Of increasing importance in this context are the relations between nation-states and the emergent supra-national state forms and between central government and local, regional and para-statal forms of rule.
- 3 Its various forms of intervention in civil society and the capitalist economy; this concerns not only the state's role in demarcating the changing boundaries between public and private but also the specific institutional mechanisms available for intervention.

The second set of three dimensions is primarily behavioural or strategic in nature. They correspond to the underlying, the inner-dwelling and the

part of the state
 define relevance of it

overarching forces in the state and political systems. The first dimension is not too controversial: its inclusion is based on the argument that specific forms of state and regime comprise the material condensation (or institutional embodiment) of particular social compromises. Thus each state or regime can be related to a social base (or bases) which provide its stable core of support and comprise in turn its principal beneficiaries. The next two dimensions derive from the part-whole paradox of the state (considered more fully below). This paradox is rooted in the fact that the state is but one institutional order among others in a given social formation; and yet it is peculiarly charged with responsibility for maintaining the integration and cohesion of the wider society. In one respect, then, it is just a 'part' of society; in another, by virtue of this political responsibility, it is the 'whole'.¹⁴ In this sense the state must be considered in terms both of the 'state projects' which define its internal unity and *modus operandi* (modes of policy-making etc.) and in terms of its purposes for the wider society. These three dimensions are:

- 1 The social bases of state power, i.e. the nature of the power bloc, supporting classes or other social forces and alliances whose unstable equilibrium of compromise is crystallized in the state system.
- 2 The state practices and projects which define the boundaries of the state system and endow it with a degree of internal unity. The state does not exist as a fully constituted, internally coherent, organizationally pure and operationally closed system but is an emergent, contradictory, hybrid and relatively open system. Thus there can be no inherent substantive unity to the state *qua* institutional ensemble: its (always relative) unity must be created within the state system itself through specific operational procedures, means of coordination and guiding purposes. If this analytic dimension corresponds to the 'part' moment of the 'part-whole' paradox of the state, the next reflects the 'whole' moment.
- 3 The discourses which define the illusory community whose interests and social cohesion are to be managed by the state within the framework of a given historic bloc and hegemonic project. The latter provides political, intellectual and moral guidelines for the conduct of state policy. This may subsume an accumulation strategy but there is no necessary relationship between hegemonic projects and accumulation strategies.

This list is not intended to be exhaustive but it does provide an initial framework for analysing different aspects of the state and to produce more or less complex descriptions of particular states and their strategic selectivities. Likewise it can be used to relate the state to the broader political system and its environing social formation. Indeed, given the problems we have already discussed concerning the state's identity and unity, its place within the political system is one of its fundamental features. Finally, it is also within this context that one could explore different dimensions of state crisis. Thus one could distinguish representational crisis, institutional crisis, rationality crisis, a crisis

1. 2 projects
2. 1 project
3. 1 project

1. 2 projects
2. 1 project
3. 1 project

of hegemony, legitimacy crisis and organic crisis.¹⁵ There is much work still to be done here.

The Idea of the State and the State as Idea

In discussing the 'state as strategy' I have often alluded to the constitutive role of 'state projects' in securing the (relative) unity of the state. One could go further and suggest that it is only in and through discourses about the state that the process of state formation itself became possible. Studies on how and why the idea of the state emerged already have a long history. Some take the emergence of the state and/or its nature for granted and merely describe how the 'state' concept was developed to describe this new political reality. But others suggest that the state's genesis as well as its changing form and functions have depended as much on specific state projects as they have on the political 'raw materials' available to state-builders. For, without the historically novel concepts of the state and state reason, states could not have been constituted as distinct, impersonal political organizations responsible for the military defence and welfare of people in a clearly bounded territory.

'State' Semantics and State Structures

The concept of 'state' and the discourses in which it is embedded are relatively modern developments. Yet there are also countless studies of the primitive origins of state structures. Does this mean that state semantics lagged millennia behind state formation; or does it mean that the pre-modern political organizations which modern commentators conventionally call 'states' were not really state-like? One answer to this double-barrelled question can be found in the reasons why the concept of the 'state' emerged as and when it did. It seems that part of the explanation lies in the contrast between the transparency of political life in traditional societies and its abstract form in modern societies. In traditional societies the political system was identified with a specific personage, agency or institution (the polis, *communitas*, *civitas*, *regnum* etc.) and it was directly around these that political action was organized. Modern societies are functionally differentiated, each functional sub-system is internally complex and there is no superordinate sub-system. Thus no single personage, agency or institution can symbolize or embody the political system: and, in addition, as the state becomes more complex, it is increasingly distinct from the people over whom it rules. A more abstract concept is therefore required to establish the identity of the core political apparatus and to orientate political action. 'State' is this concept. Indeed, as the political system becomes institutionally more

distinct, the idea of the state becomes more clearly demarcated in relation to religion, education, economy, science and so on. Moreover, as the political system itself becomes more complex internally, juridico-political discourse also grows more complex with the development of constitutions, the separation of powers, rules about representation etc. (Luhmann 1984b: 107–8; cf. Nettl 1968).

We can take this argument further by referring to a recent study in historical semantics by Luhmann. This stresses the link between the emerging state apparatus and the positive value attached to a peaceful state of affairs, to state as peace and security. It was held that 'the state as peace requires the state as dominium and potestas'; and this in turn led to the development of *raison d'état* as a form of statecraft to show how peace can be secured (Luhmann 1989b: 80–5). Moreover, since a state of peace occurs in a given territorial realm, the state apparatus which secures this peace comes to signify both dominance over territory and the territory itself. None the less, for some time after it first emerged in its modern usage, 'state' was still a rare, *ad hoc* and changeable term. It often lacked any special significance, had no clear counter-concept or referred ambivalently both to the medieval world of stratification (status, estate etc.) and the modern world of functional differentiation (1989b: 111–12). It is for this reason, suggests Luhmann, that there were so many alternative terms for the state: regnum, *res publica*, monarchia, commonwealth, nation, civil society and so forth. Only in the second half of the eighteenth century did the term 'state' first become the dominant term for the sovereign authority. He suggests that this occurred because 'state' was counterposed to 'society' (in the partial sense of 'civil society' as an economic realm) and thereby came to signify the whole society (1989b: 113, 130).

A somewhat different argument points in the same direction but adds more weight to the key constitutive role of discourse about the state. Quentin Skinner records how the concept of state in its modern usage emerged from two different sources: (a) early political histories, advice books for magistrates and the 'mirror for princes' literature of late medieval Europe and (b) the natural law absolutist literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Regarding the former he shows how, so to speak, affairs of state were initially concerned with states of affairs. In fact, to be more precise, he shows the idea of the 'state' gradually emerged from an initial slippage or conflation between the good status, stateliness, high estate or state of majesty of rulers, the ruling apparatus and statecraft which they deployed, and the good state of affairs or state of the realm to which they aspired in the territories over which they ruled. In particular, with the rise of autonomous and self-governing city republics, there was increasing interest in the type of regime which could help rulers to maintain the state of the realm in good standing (Skinner 1989: 90–8). With the spread of the republican form of government as a sovereign public power which governed the *civitas* or *res publica*, state discourses shifted from the idea that the

ruler should maintain his estate or state of personal ascendancy towards the idea that the status or state was a governmental apparatus which he had a duty to maintain (Skinner 1989: 108–10).

The truly modern idea of the state required not merely the basic conceptual distinction between the ruler and the state apparatus but also the further distinction between that apparatus and its subjects – those over whom it ruled. This latter innovation came when absolutist theorists sought to justify the separation of the powers of government from its subjects. Thus 'the end product of natural law absolutism is the view that the ends of civil or political association make it indispensable to establish a single and supreme sovereign authority whose power remains distinct not merely from the people who originally instituted it but also from whatever office holders may be said to have the right to wield power at any particular time' (Skinner 1989: 118–19). The name they introduced for this form of political authority was, of course, the state. In their eyes the state had become doubly impersonal: it was equated neither with the ruler himself nor with the ruled in society (Skinner 1989: 112, 128).

Such analyses go beyond the claim that the idea of the state is just an ideological or conceptual reflection of structural developments in the political system. This is only partially correct. A fuller account requires one to see that concepts and doctrines about the state play a key role both in the historical development and the juridico-political formalization of the modern state. Thus, whatever the precise origins of the different components of the modern state (such as the army, bureaucracy, taxation, legal system, legislative assemblies) their organization as a relatively coherent institutional ensemble is crucially dependent on the emergence of the concept of the sovereign state. Moreover, since 'the present state' does not exist, the nature of specific states depends on the particular state projects or models of state-building which were undertaken at particular points in time. The distinctive institutional, territorial and national boundaries of the state and its purposes and activities must be defined and reproduced through discourse about the state and specific projects. Any attempt to theorize the state in abstraction from state projects is bound to lead to formalism and essentialism.

Did States Exist before 'State' Discourse?

Now, if the concept 'state' first emerged as a term to describe the emerging impersonal apparatus of political domination in modern societies, how can we talk about 'states' or 'state formations' in pre-modern periods? It all depends, as the late Professor Joad used to say, what you mean by the state! Most of the literature draws a clear analytical distinction between the 'modern state' (or state *tout court*) and traditional states and is able to set out equally clear

structural and operational distinctions between them.¹⁶ In answering this question, we can refer to what 'state' discourse signifies: this suggests two complementary responses.

If we focus on the constitutive role of 'state' discourses, then traditional forms of political organization are not true states. In exploring how they emerged, were consolidated and operated, we should examine their own local and contemporary discourses and the political projects articulated within them. If we focus on the analytic utility of the modern concept of state, however, the key issue becomes what makes traditional political organizations state-like. The answer given by Luhmann refers to the different form of societalization whose unity was represented in the state. Since pre-modern political domination was mainly concerned with projecting power from the centre into its surrounding territory, he suggests that early 'state' formation can be understood in terms of the territorialization of political dominance. For military and economic control to be extended into the countryside or periphery, however, new forms of organization were required which went beyond household management or palace administration. It is the development of these organizational forms which can be usefully described as state formation and their product as states (Luhmann 1989b: 145–6). Although this response has clearly been influenced by Luhmann's distinctive approach to social analysis, its general line seems perfectly fair.

The State, Politics and Society

The development of 'state' discourse is also reflected in changes in the meanings attached to 'politics' and to 'society'. Until the seventeenth century the concept of politics was linked to the state and society and was counterposed to the *oikos* or private household; but politics itself was not uniquely coupled with the state as opposed to society or community. Thus civil society was understood as an association of citizens subject to common laws and government; and man was regarded as a political animal (*zoon politikon*). It was only in the seventeenth century that politics was first linked to the idea of an abstract, impersonal, sovereign state distinct from other parts of society (church, economy, civil associations) and the distinction began to emerge between man in his capacity as private individual and as political citizen (cf. d'Entrèves 1967; Dyson 1982; Willke 1983; Luhmann 1984d; Bobbio 1985).

Thereafter the conceptual distinction between state and civil society seems to have developed through four overlapping stages. According to a useful survey by John Keane, these stages can be identified as: (a) a view which counterposed a sovereign, centralized constitutional state standing over its subjects to a series of independent societies which could check its potential to become authoritarian; (b) an anti-statist impulse which called for the strengthening of civil society

against the state in the interests of justice, equality and liberty; (c) a U-turn in which the need for a strong state was stressed to check the paralysis, conflict and anarchy of civil society; and (d) a renewal of the pluralist approach, in which the self-organization of civil society was emphasized as a means of resisting encroachment by the state (Keane 1988).

One interesting aspect of this conceptual history is the extent to which discourse about 'state' and 'civil society' has been concerned with problems of hegemony and social cohesion. Gramsci defined 'the state in its inclusive sense' (*lo stato integrale*) as 'political society + civil society' and referred to state power as 'hegemony armoured by coercion' (Gramsci 1971). Keane's account not only implies that there is considerable scope for political struggle over the precise forms of articulation between these two moments of the integral state; it also suggests that the unity, coherence and capacities of the state depend on movements and projects within its other – civil-society. This reinforces the arguments I advanced in chapter 10 against the central assumption of the state-centred approach that one can draw a clear boundary between state and society. Clearly I would not deny that a distinct 'state' discourse emerged *pari passu* with the modern state (and, indeed, played a crucial constitutive role as states were formed) nor that the institutions which form the state are relatively distinct from other institutional orders. These are, on the contrary, premisses of my own approach. But it does not follow that discourses about the 'state' can be analysed without referring to the 'non-state'. Whether this is considered to be the economy, society, the church or religion, sport, the public sphere, or whatever, is a distinction which makes a difference to the nature of the state itself. Nor does it follow that, because one can use one or another criterion (such as the legal distinction between 'public' and 'private') to draw a boundary around the state, there can be no interpenetration or overlap between state and non-state institutions and operations in other respects. Thus, as Gramsci long ago emphasised, both the state apparatus and state power must be analysed in relational terms.

State Projects and Reasons of State

I have already indicated that 'state' semantics were closely tied to practical advice to rulers on how to maintain their 'estate' and/or a good state of affairs in the territory over which they ruled. This suggests that state projects are almost coeval with the development of state discourse and have played a key role in the constitution of the state. Indeed Giovanni Botero (1589), one of the earliest commentators on reasons of state, used the term *ragione dello stato* to refer to the knowledge of the means proper to the founding, the conservation and the power of a state (cited Polin 1975: 27). For the concept of *raison d'état* to play such a role, however, it was essential for a clear distinction to be drawn

between the political order and the moral and/or religious spheres. This was not the case in the ancient polis. For, although the ancients were familiar with the concept of public good, public health or common interest and, indeed, placed it at the centre of political calculation, they also emphasized the essential unity of moral and political values at the heart of the community. In this context there was no space for a concept of state reason to guide the state's purposes and activities (Polin 1975). It actually emerged much later, in parallel with the modern state and the concept of political order within its state territory, and served a crucial function in securing the identity of the state. In particular, it helped emergent state formations to distinguish themselves and their own rightful claims from the hegemonial claims of the papacy, from the sectional demands of the estates, from the old medieval political morality of *bonum commune*, and from the disorder threatened by religious conflicts within the national community. In this sense it played a key role in defining the state's internal boundaries and unity against competing claims (Polin 1975; Schnur 1975).

Polin suggests both a narrow and a broad definition of *raison d'état*. In broad terms it has referred to the general field of statecraft, namely, 'the rational calculation and organization of state policy, the rational ordering of its institutions and its administration'. In its narrower usage, the discourse signifies 'the ensemble of methods, means, and decisions which have been adopted regardless of any other relevant considerations rooted in received values and morals or prevailing laws, when the health of the state demands it as well as the rational calculation of the means required to assure the common good in this situation' (Polin 1975: 30). In both cases state reason is specifically orientated to the search for the common good and the state's role in securing it (Polin 1975: 34). It seems to have developed, in short, to secure what I had earlier called the 'apparatus unity' of the state and to orientate the state's purposes and activities towards the common good of the people.

It was only later that 'state reason' was re-focused on foreign policy considerations, and it still retains a legitimacy in this context which it long ago lost in normal constitutional usage in home affairs (Polin 1975: 31; Schnur 1975: 18–20). Even in this latter context, however, it can legitimately be invoked during states of emergency. These are exceptional situations involving a clear conflict between continued respect for the rule of law and due process and the very survival of the state itself. In such cases state managers may resort to temporary, extra-legal, emergency procedures appropriate to the situation and justify this recourse in terms of protecting the integrity of the state. Indeed, for Carl Schmitt, sovereign power consisted in the right to declare states of emergency (cf. Schmitt 1932).

Even when the concept of state reason was no longer applied to normal domestic politics, state discourse did not disappear from the national political scene. Instead we find a proliferation of state discourses about the nature of the

state and its purposes: some from the top-down viewpoint of the state, some from the bottom-up viewpoint of its subjects. Meinecke treated *raison d'état* and the social contract as alternative accounts of the state (Meinecke 1957). I would suggest that they are not so much alternatives as complements: for, whereas *raison d'état* initially referred to the internal logic of the state, social contract doctrines relate more to its external purposes. And, although both discourses have largely disappeared as such from serious political debate, there are clearly numerous rivals jostling for the ear of state managers and/or the public.

Thus we find a proliferation of discourses and projects concerned with the unity of the state and its appropriate purposes in relation to the wider society. These range from mercantilism and cameralistics to *laissez-faire* and liberalism, from the *Polizeistaat* (an administrative, 'police state' orientated to the welfare of the state and its citizens, bio-politics and social improvement) to the *Rechtsstaat* (a constitutional state based on the rule of law), from the nation-state to pluri-national consociationalism, from the 'associational state' to 'corporate liberalism', from the *Sozialstaat* (social state) to the modern welfare state, from the corporate state to guild socialism, from the *Fuehrerstaat* to 'free and democratic state', from so on to so forth. This list could be continued for pages but my point should already be clear. To understand the never-ending and ever-renewed process of state formation it is not enough to examine its institutional building blocks. We must also consider the 'state projects' which bond these blocks together with the result that the state gains a certain organizational unity and cohesiveness of purpose. A state without these properties is a state only in name. It does not exist.

Is the State Capitalist?

Nothing in my proposed definition of the state has implied that it necessarily has a particular class (or gender, ethnic, national or other) content. Nor has my account of the state as idea and the role of state projects in shaping the state led to the conclusion that the state must be capitalist. I have deliberately eschewed any such implications. For claims of this kind can only be established through detailed analyses of the dialectic between state forms and political practices. 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. For, within the strategically selective limits established by state structures and operating procedures, the outcome of state power also depends on the changing balance of forces engaged in political action both within and beyond the state. Thus an adequate answer to the question is (or can) the state (be) capitalist requires us to examine both its form and the balance of forces. This I will now do.

What Makes a State Capitalist?

As I first noted in chapter 4 and have indicated on several occasions since, state power is capitalist to the extent that it creates, maintains or restores the conditions required for capital accumulation in a given situation. It is non-capitalist to the extent that these conditions are not realized. This view radically displaces our theoretical focus from the search for guarantees that the state apparatus and its functions are necessarily capitalist in all aspects to a concern with the many and varied contingent effects of state power on accumulation in specific conjunctures. These effects depend on a wide range of factors and cannot be reduced to a simple realization of the purported needs or interests of capital. Indeed, as I argued in chapters 5 and 7, these needs and interests, even at the most abstract levels of analysis, are structurally contradictory and involve strategic dilemmas. There is no single, unambiguous logic of capital – unless it be the ‘autopoietic’ logic of continually reproducing the circuit of capital regardless of the specific forms in which this occurs. It follows that there can be no single, unambiguous reference point for state managers how the state should serve the needs and interests of capital. Nor, indeed, is there such a reference point for outside observers (such as state theorists) to assess whether the state succeeds in doing so – unless it be that capital continues to be accumulated somehow or other in whatever self-substituting form emerges from the competitive search for added value.¹⁷ Obviously this does not mean that state managers (any more than corporate managers or individual entrepreneurs) fail to pursue accumulation strategies. But these are always informed by particular models of the capitalist economy and its extra-economic preconditions and a particular understanding of the logic of capital. And there can be no guarantees that they will succeed. The overall course of accumulation is itself the complex resultant of the strategies pursued at different levels and on different sites within a given conjuncture. Thus, when we assess the capitalist character of the state, it is essential to specify which particular conditions deemed contingently necessary either for a specific accumulation strategy and/or a particular regime of accumulation are being secured in what respects, over which time period and to what extent (cf. Jessop 1982: 225–6).

Naturally this argument does not rule out analyses of the formal correspondence between different social forms (e.g. the value-form, the legal form, the state form) in a social formation. For in many respects it is useful to posit a *formally adequate* type of capitalist state as a ‘rational abstraction’ to help us explore the dynamic of the state in capitalist societies. But formal correspondence does not as such explain how any actual correspondence emerges historically.¹⁸ Nor does it help us to explain how capital accumulation can occur under the most divergent state forms – even those which one might

deem formally inadequate. This general problem is reinforced by the complex relationship between the formal and historical constitution of capitalist states, all of which (typical or not) actually emerged within an already existing state system. State (or at least state-like) institutions pre-dated the rise of industrial capitalism in Europe and fundamentally shaped the form and dynamic of its subsequent global expansion. Conversely, the international nature of capital accumulation (even in its earliest stages) has always been reflected in the structures and practices of specific states. As McMichael has expressed it, ‘if the capitalist world market (which unifies various production systems) depends upon states to secure and regulate its operation, then it logically follows that the (world) history of capital is embedded in the history of states’ (McMichael 1987: 188, parentheses in original). This necessary historical dimension in the development of individual states means that there is little reason to expect a convergence among states in capitalist societies. They will vary with national modes of growth and their changing insertion into the world market as well as with changes in the balance of class(-relevant) forces. In short, we must consider the dynamics of the structural coupling or co-evolution of changing capitalist economies and state forms to form specific historical blocs. This is not to deny the constitutive role of specific state and/or societalization projects aimed at effectuating such a correspondence. But one would still need to consider the conditions which made for their relative success or failure.

The Capitalist Type of State

With these caveats in mind, let us briefly review the most important structural features of a typical capitalist nation-state. These comprise: its institutional separation from the core of capitalist production and its concomitant ‘constituted’ monopoly over the means of coercion, its form as a tax-state and the role of money as the economic matrix of its activities, and the role of law and rational-legal bureaucracy as the administrative matrix of these activities. Each of these features is not only compatible with, but also potentially supportive, of the capitalist economic order. In this sense they can be regarded as ‘formally adequate’ to a capitalist economic formation (cf. chapter 6). In addition to these three formally adequate properties of the capitalist type of state, other such properties can be identified for specific phases of capitalism. Changes in the state’s economic role typically involve changes in its institutional form. Growing state intervention is typically associated with the strengthening of the executive at the expense of the legislative branch, the rise of functional (as opposed to territorial) representation closely tied to the administration, the increased importance of the state economic apparatus and the growing dominance of economic criteria within non-economic departments, and the decline of the substantive rule of law (as opposed to the simple maintenance of

legal forms) in favour of more discretionary forms of intervention. Thus the growth of state economic intervention leaves neither the economy nor the state unchanged. The circuit of capital is socialized through the state and the state is reorganized to reflect economic needs (cf. chapters 1 and 2).

Clearly the three main institutional traits of the capitalist type of state are neither logically nor historically necessary for accumulation to occur. Nor, where they have developed, do they actually guarantee accumulation. This is not simply because economic factors themselves engender recurrent crises within capitalism. There are also distinct political reasons. These are rooted in the institutional form of the state and in struggles over state power. To take only three examples. The institutional separation between the state and economy is expressed above all in the state's monopoly of coercion and its claims to promote national-popular unity against the antagonistic private interests of civil society. This means that the state has the political and ideological capacities to disturb, as well as to promote, capital accumulation.¹⁹ Nor does the tax-form have any self-evident limits. It can produce fiscal crises and/or inflationary public finance as well as generate disproportions between state expenditure and the requirements of capital accumulation. Thirdly, because the rule of law implies formal neutrality towards particular economic agents, it is correspondingly inadequate as a steering mechanism. But more purposive, *ad hoc*, discretionary interventions can produce bureaucratic overload and also disrupt the labour process and capitalist market forces. Whether such problems occur depends not only on the form of the state and its integration into the circuit of capital but also on the changing balance of political forces.

More generally we can list five general factors which limit the state's capacities to intervene effectively in the capitalist economy. These will hold for all stages of capitalism and particularly affect the capitalist type of state.

First, since the state is excluded from the heart of the production process, it must either react *a posteriori* to events it cannot directly control and/or engage in ineffective *a priori* planning. Secondly, the state tends to respond to economic problems and crises in terms of surface phenoema (such as rates of inflation, unemployment levels or trade deficits) which have no obvious or consistent relationship to the real course of capital accumulation. This means that state policies often have limited or perverse effects on the real economy. There are, thirdly, inherent limitations in using law and money as steering mechanisms in a constitutional tax-state. For both mechanisms operate at a distance from real economic agents and processes and leave considerable scope for avoidance and evasion of intended effects. Fourthly, where market failures occur, the state itself might provide goods and services. But, although public provision may sometimes directly or indirectly promote private capital accumulation, it clearly withdraws money from the immediate circuit of capital. It can also promote fiscal crises and/or suggest that the commodity form is neither natural nor necessary.

Fifthly, in so far as the state and its managers are clearly differentiated from the capitalist economy, there is scope for conflicts of interest and priorities so that government policies do not reflect the needs of capital. For the nature of the state affects its inputs, withinputs and outputs. On the input side, economic needs must be translated into political demands through whatever organizational and institutional channels are available; and they must be coupled with political values and legal norms which are often only indirectly relevant to economic considerations. Within the state system it is the balance of political forces which determines how these economic demands are expressed in economic policies. This will vary with the individual forms of policy production (e.g. bureaucratic, purposive programming, participation, delegation to professionals) and with the manner in which some basic unity is imposed on the state's many activities. Each mode of policy production contains its own limitations and dilemmas; and, in addition, problems of internal state unity often preclude the flexible responses needed for economic management. These problems are aggravated because political forces are generally most immediately concerned with other political forces and only indirectly with the economic sphere. Accordingly it is the political repercussions of economic events and crises which matter more than their inherent economic form or substance. And, on the output side, state activities are generally mediated in and through its own forms of intervention which operate at one or more removes from the real economy.

Taken together these limitations trap the state in two double-binds: the one economic, the other political. First, when the state intervenes to alleviate structural economic crises, it must substitute its own policies for the purgative effects of market-mediated reorganization. Thus it typically changes the forms in which economic crises operate rather than eliminating them and it can even introduce such crises into the state. Here they can take such forms as fiscal crises, legitimacy crises, representational crises, crises of internal unity and crises of governmental effectiveness or overload. But, since the state's role has now become vital for accumulation, it cannot solve economic crises simply by withdrawing or refusing to intervene. At best it can reorganize how it intervenes. Moreover, in so far as economic crises are seen to follow from such withdrawal, refusal or reorganization, they can also precipitate new forms of political crisis. Secondly, in attempting to resolve crises on behalf of capital, it faces a political dilemma. If its crisis-management deliberately favours one fraction of capital at the expense of others, it is liable to aggravate economic problems for capital as a whole and to weaken its own legitimacy. But, even if it succeeds in winning support for policies in the collective interests of capital, it cannot thereby avoid favouring some capitals more than others. This will modify the balance of forces and could disturb the initial alliance which sustained such policies.

And, just to make matters worse, all of these limitations are intensified by

the fact that there are many nation-states and they confront an increasingly global capitalism. The international scope and flexibility of capital makes it difficult for individual nation-states to monitor and control the course of capital accumulation. Paradoxically, the internationalization of capital does not dissolve the need for state intervention. It merely makes it more difficult to achieve.

In short, even though a given state has a typically capitalist form, it might not actually function to secure accumulation. This can only be established through analyses of the overall impact of state power in relation to specific accumulation strategies in specific conjunctures. Conversely, as noted above, there are many examples of states lacking typical features of the capitalist state where it is none the less possible for capital to be accumulated. In this sense my proposed approach seeks to instal political practice and discourse alongside an analysis of state forms and apparatuses at the heart of any serious analysis of the state system.

Structural Coupling and Strategic Coordination

Although much of the preceding analysis has been concerned with the formal adequacy of the state in capitalist societies to the reproduction requirements of the capital relation, it has also noted that the very form of this state problematizes its functionality for capital. This holds even for the capitalist type of state and there is no reason to believe that it is less true for other forms of state. In turn this poses the problem of how two institutionally separate and self-referential systems can be articulated. In this context I propose that we focus less on the difficult concept of 'relative autonomy' than on two others: those of structural coupling and strategic coordination. Both notions start out from the autonomy of different systems, their co-existence, and their interdependence and each points to a key mechanism whereby they come to be coupled.

'Structural coupling' refers to the co-evolution of autonomous structures which share at least in part the same social space. In referring to structural coupling I have in mind four features of the relations among such structures: first, the structures concerned follow their own *Eigendynamik* and are neither hierarchically controlled nor functionally subordinate to other structures; secondly, they are not autarkic or self-sufficient but depend on inputs from their environment for their own operation; thirdly, they are not hermetically sealed off from their environments but experience changes therein as perturbations or disturbances which affect their own operation; and, fourthly, in reacting to changes in their environment, they do so in terms of their own rules for reducing the complexity of that environment and thus environmental influences are always mediated through the system's own procedures. The combination of

these features means that the development of a given autonomous structure is conditioned by its relations with other structures but follows its own logic. Thus the history of its relations with its environment is imprinted in its present organization and *modus operandi* but how this occurs is mediated through its own specific modes of calculation, modes of operation and so forth. In turn its development is structurally coupled to that of the structures in its environment. The result is that structures co-evolve in and through the uncoordinated interplay of variations, selections and restabilizations as structures interact. The final outcome is neither plannable nor forecastable. We are dealing with an ecological relation in which some systems may be dominant, but not where one dominates (cf. Morin 1980: 44).

Through this co-existence they constitute sources of perturbation for each other and each reacts to these perturbations in terms of its own modes of calculation and operating procedures. In this sense the development of one structure affects the evolution of the other: but it neither controls it in a hierarchical relation of command nor subordinates it through a functionalist logic which requires one system to act for and on behalf of the other system. As my discussion of economic determination in and through the dynamic of productive capital has emphasized, the capital relation has a self-determining dynamic. It is not the ultimate, exclusive cause of events in other spheres of society. Moreover, by starting out from a form analysis of capital and the capitalist type of state, I have tried to emphasize the extent to which form problematizes function. Thus the capitalist type of state does not operate as a functional sub-system of the capitalist mode of production whose primary task is to create, maintain and restore the conditions for capital accumulation. Nor, of course, is it the over-riding function of the capitalist system to produce use-values and/or revenues to serve the reproduction of the capitalist state. Instead both systems operate according to their own institutional rules, operating procedures and priorities: the capitalist economy according to the law of value, the capitalist state in terms of prevailing state projects and definitions of 'illusory community'.

If the concept of 'structural coupling' points towards the formal and substantive articulation of different structures treated as autonomous structures, the concept of strategic coordination points towards the strategic dimension of co-evolution considered from the viewpoint of specific social forces or agencies. Since the structure of the social world is always more complex than any social force can conceive and its overall evolution lies beyond the control of any social force, strategic coordination can only occur in the context of the uncontrolled and anarchic structural coupling of co-evolving structures. But this does not mean that it is impossible to intervene in this evolutionary process to produce specific results (even if there are inevitably unforeseen or unintended consequences and side-effects). It is the strategic aspect of relations among systems and structures that I refer to as strategic

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coordination. At issue here are explicit attempts to coordinate the action of different organizations, structures and systems to produce specific results. These can amount to little more than negative coordination through mutual use of veto power but can also extend to more positive attempts at strategic coordination. This is the field of accumulation strategies, state projects and hegemonic projects.

There are two aspects to strategic coordination which merit some attention: the capacities of specific forces to engage in steering and the vulnerabilities of specific forces or structures to steering attempts. Different organizations, structures and systems have their own steering media (e.g. law, money, coercion) which they can use to influence other organizations, structures and systems. Such steering or coordination does not involve total systems but is mediated through social forces capable of action; they can anticipate the probable reactions of other forces and the responses of the systems to be steered and will orientate their choice of steering instruments to it (cf. Scharpf 1989: 17–19). The other aspect of strategic coordination concerns the vulnerabilities of social forces, institutional orders or social systems. Since power is always relational, changes in the balance of force can be effected through shifts in both capacities and/or vulnerabilities. And, since no social force, institutional order or social system is self-sufficient, each is vulnerable to at least some forms of internal crisis, external failures or mode of attack. It is this combination of capacities and vulnerabilities to which the concept of strategic selectivity orientates us.

The Paradox of State and Society

Almost all the essays in this volume have indicated a need for what, in later essays, is termed the 'strategic-relational' approach. Some implications of this have just been presented in terms of a new approach to 'the problem of the capitalist state' (Poulantzas 1969). Here I want to generalize this approach and move away from a one-sided concern with capitalist societalization by developing an argument about the 'part-whole' paradox, first mentioned in relation to the six possible analytical dimensions of the state. This paradox emerges from the fact that the state is just one institutional ensemble among others within a social formation; but it is peculiarly charged with overall responsibility for maintaining the cohesion of the social formation of which it is a part. We have just seen this paradox illustrated in my analysis of the capitalist state. For the latter is charged with responsibility for securing the conditions for accumulation when market forces fail and with securing social cohesion in a class-divided society. But, in pursuing these responsibilities, state managers can only employ the strategic capacities available to the state and these are always limited relative to the tasks facing them. Nor is there any direct

translation of capitalist imperatives into the goals of the state. In short the state's capacities to secure capital accumulation are limited in regard to inputs, withinputs and outputs. This problem is by no means confined to the state's role in relation to accumulation. It is an inevitable feature of the state's paradoxical position as both part and whole of society.

The 'material' basis and support of its responsibility for the whole is the constitutionalized monopoly of physical force which the modern state enjoys and the organizational capacity which this gives to a hierarchically organized, sovereign state to enforce decisions binding on the social agents (individuals or organizations) deemed to fall under its jurisdiction. Its 'ideological' basis and motor force is the construction of the state and/or state managers as a subject to which this overall responsibility can be attributed. The fact that the state is constituted as a juridical subject or endowed with political responsibility does not thereby guarantee that it is a real subject capable of independent action.²⁰ Nor, as Marx remarked in his critique of Hegel, do lofty claims or even hard-nosed demands that bureaucrats (or other state managers) act as a 'universal class' ensure that they do actually promote the commonweal rather than their own (or other) particular interests. None the less these fictions have real effects on political expectations and conduct and so get honoured in the breach and continually reproduced. But because they are fictions and because the state is merely one structurally coupled part of the social formation, it can never play the role expected of it. For the state is an institutional ensemble and not a subject; even where consensus emerges around a conception of the common good, it is always a particular conception with partial implications; and the exercise of the state's powers always comes up against structural constraints and resistances which inevitably limit its ability to master the social formation. It is this complex mix of political fiction and political reality which continually reproduces both the hubris and the tragedy of the state.²¹

This primary paradox is reflected in four other aspects of 'state-society' relations.

- 1 Although the state plays a key role in defining the identity of the society, its identity is contested in turn by forces rooted in other spheres. On the one hand, actually existing societies do not pre-exist the state systems but are constituted in part through state activities. We have already noted how the territory and the society over which a state holds sway come to be identified with that state; and, in external affairs ranging from diplomacy and war to sporting and cultural exchange, the state is widely considered to speak on behalf of society. But, on the other hand, a host of non-state forces within and beyond the political system struggle to (re)build the state and redefine its projects. This produces continuous cycles of definition and redefinition in which states shape society and social forces shape the state.
- 2 Although the state has its own distinctive dynamic and strategic capacities so that it is resistant to direct external control, the various spheres of society also have their own distinctive logics and capacities which prevent their direct control by the state.

Different states develop their own political discourses, their own rhythms and temporalities, their own interests and capacities. It is these which ensure that state activities make a difference within the social formation, are recalcitrant to external control because of their own internal complexities and so must be taken into account by agents elsewhere in that formation. But there are many other institutional orders which have obtained comparable degrees of internal complexity, operate according to their own modes of calculation, follow their own temporal patterns and have their own distinctive resources and capacities. This renders them in turn recalcitrant to direct control by the state.²²

- 3 This is reflected in a third paradox. For, as the state intervenes more and more in different spheres of society (giving the impression that state power is growing), it undergoes two types of change which undermine its strength. On the one hand, its own unity and distinctive identity diminish as it becomes more complex internally, its powers are fragmented among different branches and policy networks, and problems of coordination multiply. It is for this reason that neo-liberals insist on the apparent paradox that the state can only be strong if it places limits on its own ambitions and powers. And, on the other hand, as state intervention increases, the state depends increasingly on the cooperation of other social forces to secure success for its interventions so that state power is increasingly subordinate to, or interlinked with, external forces (cf. Offe 1987). It is for this reason that some state theorists suggest that the modern state can only become strong if it gives up pretensions to sovereignty (or the potential for despotic power) and shares its powers with other forces (to increase its infrastructural power) (e.g. Hall and Ikenberry 1989).
- 4 Even when the state acts in the name of *raison d'état* or invokes states of emergency which suspend normal representative mechanisms, its legitimacy depends on linking state interests and actions to those of society. State reason has always been linked to claims about the common good and/or national interest; and states of emergency or periods of dictatorship have typically been justified in terms of an eventual return to normality – when competing definitions of the national-popular interest will once again be the common currency of political discourse. Thus, in addition to the generic phenomenon of interdiscursivity which entails a potential for articulating various discourses (see chapter 11), political discourse has its own specific incentives to thematize issues from beyond the political realm. State and official discourses can never be self-contained: they are always open to disarticulation and disruption by forces beyond the state.

In previous chapters I have referred to strategic dilemmas and the ways in which they present inescapable problems requiring strategic choices. Since any choice privileges one horn of the dilemma, there is a tendency for the problems involved in neglecting the other horn to grow until a strategic switch is required. This helps to explain the policy cycles which occur in so many different areas. Here I have dealt with some of the paradoxes which arise from the part-whole relationship between state and society. These are often reflected in strategic dilemmas. To take just two examples relating to paradoxes of state intervention: for any given accumulation regime and mode of growth, there will be various extra-economic preconditions which must be satisfied. If the state

cannot or will not intervene to secure these itself, it must intervene to create the conditions for their provision through other agencies and/or to cope with the repercussions of a failure to secure them. Thus neo-liberal disengagement in some areas is often accompanied sooner or later by increased intervention in other areas. How this dilemma is resolved will be reflected in state projects and accumulation strategies. In such cases the second paradox is also relevant. Failure to intervene leaves other institutional orders free to pursue their own logics to the possible detriment of state goals; but intervention can fail because it disrupts the operation of other institutional orders and provokes resistance or other counter-productive effects. One possible solution is for the state to resort to societal guidance strategies based on prior consultation with agencies from other systems, formal or substantive state facilitation of their activities where these coincide with agreed objectives, and reliance on these agencies to find the most appropriate ways to pursue these objectives within the terms of their own institutional logic. But this form of state intervention simply displaces the problems into the domain of state fragmentation and disunity. In other cases the paradoxes could be hidden from public view through official secrecy, covert action, misinformation, deliberate ambiguities, contrasts between symbolic political action or rhetoric and substantive political actions and so forth. Where these techniques do not bear directly on strategic dilemmas, they may succeed for some considerable time. Indeed, there are myriad forms of coping with these paradoxes and this reinforces the claims for adopting a strategic-relational approach to the state.

The State and Other Institutional Orders

The preceding remarks suggest that analyses of the state cannot be restricted to studies of government. Yet, even when state theorists adopt more inclusive approaches, they still focus too often on the state's formal, institutional aspects and neglect its substantive, subjective aspects. The latter are crucial to the state's own strategic capacities and the chances of compliance from forces beyond the state (cf. Jaeger 1979: 53f). The main exception here is Gramsci's account of the 'integral state', i.e. political society + civil society. Although sometimes criticized for failing to demarcate the state's boundaries (e.g. Anderson 1980), Gramsci was far less concerned with the state apparatus than with state power. For Gramsci the latter was overdetermined by its links to institutions and forces in the broader political system and, indeed, society as a whole. This is why he paid so much attention to the roles of the party system and intellectuals in articulating and mediating the complex relations between political and civil society. It also explains why so many of his concepts deal with subjective elements (commonsense, identity, will-formation, leadership, education) in political life (cf. Jaeger 1979).

From this perspective the party system involves far more than electoral strategies and the relations among voters, parties and leaders. For political parties actively link different spheres of society and different social forces and, in securing the social bases of states, help to constitute specific state forms. In turn a crisis in the party system is often associated with a crisis in the state – especially if it affects the natural governing party. For the relative operational unity, if any, of the state's powers cannot be derived from constitutional guarantees nor explained as the simple product of the parallelogram of forces on the biased terrain of the state. Its unity results from the exercise of a political leadership concerned to promote and manage a 'party spirit' which gives shape and coherence to the state and links it to a national-popular consciousness which transcends both egoism and group particularism. Thus, for Gramsci, it is in the party that the leaders and the state officials are educated (cf. Sassoon 1980: 134–50 and *passim*; Migliaro and Misuraca 1982: 81).

This sort of analysis can be taken further by locating individual parties in the party system as a whole and considering how this in turn relates to the overall institutional structure of the state. For the relations between different parties are crucial for their role in (dis)organizing political forces and developing a collective will. It is the party system which defines the cleavages around which political life revolves and influences the framework in which a national-popular will might emerge. The institutional matrix of the state influences in turn the form assumed by party systems. Here again we are faced with a complex dialectic. For example, as the executive branch gains power at the expense of parliament, the role of political parties changes and becomes more marginal and other channels for political representation and articulating the political imaginary become more important. Policy networks and functional representation often play a crucial role in political organization and the mass media assume some of the functions traditionally ascribed to the party system in defining the collective will (cf. Poulantzas 1978a).

Once we begin exploring these mediations, it is surprising how varied they can be. Rather than explore them all here it is more important to draw a general conclusion. Unless one examines how state power is realized in and through specific social practices and forces, it could go unexplained or be explained away in terms of structural guarantees and/or functional imperatives. It was the failure of structural Marxism and the capital logic school to explore these mediations which encouraged them to treat the state in capitalist societies as essentially capitalist and to explain this in terms of 'speculative' categories such as determination in the last instance or the state's role as an ideal collective capitalist (cf. Migliaro and Misuraca 1982: 80). The way to overcome this impasse is through the strategic-relational approach with its emphasis on the continuing interplay between strategies and structures.

Whither State Theory?

To conclude the conclusion this section proposes six general theses about the modern state²³ and then draws a general conclusion about the nature of research on the state. The six theses complement and build on the theoretical guidelines for analysing the state set out in chapter 4, my comments on structure and strategy presented here in chapter 8, my remarks on the strategic-theoretical approach presented above all in chapter 9 and my views on autopoietic systems theory and its implications for Marxism summarized in chapter 11.²⁴ Although they cannot substitute for the fuller accounts in the earlier chapters, they can serve to develop some of their connections and thereby bring out the more general implications of the strategic-relational approach.

First, an adequate account of the state can only be developed as part of a theory of society. The state must be related not only to the broader political system but also to its wider social environment. This does not mean that the state has no distinctive properties and can therefore be fully derived and explained from other factors and forces: for, once constituted historically and characterized by its own distinctive forms of organization and modes of calculation, the state does acquire a logic of its own. But it does mean that, for all its institutional separation and operational autonomy, the state remains part of society and must be related to the wider society. For, if it is true that the distinctive feature of a state system is its concern with the illusory general interest of a divided society and that state power concentrates and condenses power relations within society as a whole, the state can only be understood by examining the emergence of projects to promote the general interest and relating them to the changing balance of forces beyond as well as within the state. However, although the state is the key site of the illusory community and general will formation, the political imaginary is always selective and inevitably marginalizes some wills and interests.

Secondly, modern societies are so complex and differentiated that no sub-system could be structurally 'determinant in the last instance' nor could any one organization form the apex of a singular hierarchy of command whose rule extends everywhere. Instead, there are many different sub-systems and even more centres of power. Many of these have developed to an extent which places them beyond direct control by outside forces, the state included. Each is none the less involved in complex relations of functional and resource interdependence with other sub-systems and is also faced with the problem that it cannot directly control the actions of the other sub-systems in its environment. This engenders a paradox in which modern societies reveal both a growing independence and growing interdependence among their parts.

Thirdly, the state is the supreme embodiment of this paradox. Among the various institutional orders in modern societies, it is the state which is responsible in the last instance for managing their interdependence. But, as one

institutional order among others, it can only do so through its own institutions, organizations and procedures. Thus, although the state is empowered to make and enforce collectively binding decisions, its actions in this respect are a specific, selective concentration and condensation of struggles within the overall political system and their success depends on conditions and forces beyond its immediate reach. In this sense the success of the state depends on its integration into an historic bloc characterized by a non-necessary, socially constituted and discursively reproduced relative unity. Such an historic bloc would emerge from the evolutionary structural coupling of different institutional orders and from the impact of various strategic projects intended to bring about some measure of correspondence. It could well reflect the primacy of one institutional order which has attained the greatest degree of operational autonomy within the de-centred social formation. The precise weighting of blind and guided evolutionary processes will vary from case to case but attention must always be given to both. Failure to do so could lead to the randomization of history (where the stress falls on the arbitrariness of any and all articulations),²⁵ voluntarism (an exaggerated emphasis on the strategic constitution of historic blocs) or determinism (due to overemphasis on the determining role of one institutional order in producing the correspondence). If the state's apparent success depends on the modalities of its integration into an historic bloc, however, it is arbitrary to attribute this success to the exercise of state power alone.

Fourthly, the state must be analysed both as a complex institutional ensemble with its own modes of calculation and operational procedures and as a site of political practices which seek to deploy its various institutions and capacities for specific purposes. Rather than trying to define the core of the state in *a priori* terms, we need to explore how its boundaries are established through specific practices within and outside the state. Moreover, in identifying this core, one is neither claiming that this exhausts the state nor that this core (let alone the extended state) is a unified, unitary, coherent ensemble or agency. Instead the boundaries of the state and its relative unity as an ensemble or agency would be contingent. It is in this context that we must examine the various projects and practices which imbue the state with relative institutional unity and facilitate its coherence with the wider society. In many cases we can expect to find several rival emergent 'states' corresponding to competing state projects with no overall coherence to the operations of the state system.

Fifthly, as an institutional ensemble the state does not (and cannot) exercise power: it is not a real subject. Indeed, rather than speaking about the power of the state, we should speak about the various potential structural powers (or state capacities) inscribed in the state as institutional ensemble. How far and in what ways such powers (as well as any associated liabilities) are realized will depend on the action, reaction and interaction of specific social forces located both within and beyond this complex ensemble. In short, the state does not exercise power: its powers (in the plural) are activated through the agency of

definite political forces in specific conjunctures. It is not the state which acts: it is always specific sets of politicians and state officials located in specific parts of the state system. It is they who activate specific powers and state capacities inscribed in particular institutions and agencies. And, as in all cases of social action, there will always be unacknowledged conditions influencing the success or failure of their actions as well as unanticipated consequences which follow from them.

Sixthly, these structural powers or capacities and their realization cannot be understood by focusing on the state alone – even assuming one could precisely define its institutional boundaries. For, considered as an institutional ensemble rather than a real (or fictive) subject, the state comprises an ensemble of centres which offer unequal chances to different forces within and outside the state to act for different political purposes. This is what it means to talk about the strategic selectivity of the state system. Moreover, although the state system does have its own distinctive resources and powers, it also has distinctive liabilities as well as needs for resources which are produced elsewhere in its environment. This means that the powers of the state are always conditional and relational. Their realization depends on the structural ties between the state and its encompassing political system, the strategic links among state managers and other political forces, and the complex web of interdependencies and social networks linking the state system to its broader environment.

If we take these general theses seriously, then research on the state should proceed in tandem with more general theoretical and empirical work on the structuration of social relations. This can be justified on various grounds sketched above. Thus, if state theorists continue to define their field of research as the state, this need not suggest that they adopt a reified, fetishistic concept of the state. Instead it could mean that, within the general context of research concerned with the dialectic of structure and strategy, their special field of interest is state power. This would involve research on two main issues. State theorists would focus on the distinctive ways in which the specific institutional and organizational ensemble identified as the state condenses and materializes social power relations and they would examine how the political imaginary (in which ideas about the state play a crucial orientating role) is articulated, mobilizes social forces around specific projects and finds expression on the terrain of the state. In this context Marxist state theorists would focus on the connections between state power and class domination. But there is no reason why those interested in other forms of power and domination could not adopt the same strategic-relational approach in their own preferred field of enquiry.

Notes

- 1 In writing this chapter I benefited from the comments of Rene Bertramsen, Citlali Rovirosa Madrazo, Rob Stones and Carsten Wiegrefe.
- 2 For a useful critique of the failure of mainstream sociology to theorize the state, see Badie and Birnbaum 1983: 25–64.
- 3 On essential contestability, see Connolly 1974.
- 4 I was also imprudent enough to offer a definition of law and the legal order at the conclusion of my review of Marxist theories of law, state and juridico-political ideology (see p. 77 above).
- 5 On cluster concepts, see Connolly 1974: 14–15.
- 6 Types of state are theoretical constructs which define which forms of political organization might correspond to the basic elements of different modes of production: they provide a point of reference for the analysis of states in specific social formations. Engaging in this sort of theoretical exercise does not imply that every state in a capitalist society will correspond to the capitalist type of state. Cf. Poulantzas 1973.
- 7 Cf. the arguments on the common good, public interest and so on in chapters 4 and 7.
- 8 This threefold structure is similar to that which appears to organize Poulantzas's theorization of the state. See the discussion in Jessop 1985a.
- 9 This is what Marx would call a 'rational abstraction'. He himself provided a definition of 'production in general' to serve the same purpose in his account of the CMP. Thus, although neither production in general nor general production actually exists, it makes sense conceptually to fix the common elements of production in order to analyse the specificity of a particular mode and/or type of production (cf. Marx 1857).
- 10 At a minimum this could comprise a *corporation sole*, i.e. a single, permanent 'office' with changing incumbency.
- 11 The separation between officialdom and people need not exclude the exercise of administrative authority against members of the administration in their private capacities as members of the public. Nor does it preclude the use of administrative power to govern the administration itself.
- 12 Those unhappy with three terms which have their roots in state monopoly capitalism theory could readily substitute new terms. Regulation theorists, for example, might prefer an alternative periodization in terms of successive accumulation regimes.
- 13 What is normal and what exceptional can only be defined in relation to a given type of state: in the capitalist type, normality is equated with democratic republican forms.
- 14 We know from Luhmann that no single sub-system in a functionally differentiated, modern society can represent the whole; instead each sub-system advances its own distinctive claim to represent the whole in terms of its own *Leitdifferenz*. One could also argue, for example, that the economy (a part) presents itself as responsible for providing the whole with commodities. This claim was actually one of the bases Marx put forward for arguing that the economy is determinant in the last instance: for, as he put it, 'every schoolchild knows that a society which ceased to produce for

- a year, nay, even for a week, and to feed itself would die' (Marx 1867). On Luhmann's analysis, see chapter 11.
- 15 The concepts of representational crisis, crisis of hegemony and organic crisis derive from Gramsci (1971); rationality crisis and legitimacy crisis from Juergen Habermas (1973); and institutional crisis is discussed by Poulantzas (1970).
- 16 Some recent texts touching on the traditional state include: Anderson 1974a; Tilley 1975; Poggi 1978; Giddens 1985; Mann 1986; Luhmann 1989b.
- 17 It is exactly this difficulty that leads even sophisticated state theorists, such as Poulantzas, to fall back into a reductionist position. For, if capital's interest is simply the reproduction of the circuit of capital, then, short of revolution, 'the (capitalist) state, in the long run, can only correspond to the political interests of the dominant class or classes' (Poulantzas 1976a: 72). As Poulantzas goes on to note, this is distinctly unhelpful and one must then proceed to explore the conjunctural determinations of the state's relative autonomy case by case.
- 18 The distinction between formal and historical constitution was central to the work of West German state theorists such as Heide Gerstenberger, Hunno Hochberger and Joachim Hirsch. For a brief account of their work, see Jessop 1982: 112–17.
- 19 Gramsci (1971) provides an interesting comparison between the success of the French Revolution, based on its expansive hegemony, and the failure of Italian unification, based on a 'passive revolution'. In addition one would need to explore the structural limits of law, money and other forms of intervention.
- 20 Where this juridical convention is internalized by state managers so that they orientate their actions towards it as an essential part of their own identity, one could perhaps talk of the state as a collective subject. Cf. Teubner's arguments on corporate personality: Teubner 1987a.
- 21 Willke (1987c) comments on this in terms of 'the tragedy of the state'.
- 22 This theme is stressed above all in Luhmann's work; solutions in terms of societal guidance and decentralized planning are proposed in Glasgow and Willke 1987.
- 23 I use the phrase 'modern state' to emphasize that the capitalist type of state characteristic of modern, functionally differentiated societies, need not have 'capitalist' effects. See above pp. 353–8.
- 24 The guidelines were discussed more fully in the final chapter of *The Capitalist State* (1982). The analysis of structure and strategy is also presented at greater length in my critiques of regulation theory and its critics: on regulation theory, see Jessop 1990b; on its critics, Jessop 1988c and 1990c. The discussion of the strategic-relational approach is most fully presented in chapter 9 but it was anticipated in the concluding chapter of *Nicos Poulantzas* (1985a). The critique of autopoiesis is presented most fully in Jessop 1987b.
- 25 This is the charge levelled at Laclau and Mouffe's discourse analytic approach to hegemony. See Meiksins Wood 1986; Rustin 1987.