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Dialogue of the Deaf: Some Reflections on the Poulantzas-Miliband Debate

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The state is such a complex theoretical object and so complicated an empirical one that no single theoretical approach can fully capture and explain its complexities. The resulting aporia was reflected in the debate between Nicos Poulantzas and Ralph Miliband on the nature, form, and functions of the state and, *a fortiori*, on the best way to analyse these issues. Indeed their mutual critiques became a key reference point in anglophone discussions on the state during the 1970s and 1980s and were also taken up in many other contexts (for an intellectual history of the debate and its context, see Barrow, 2002). The main state theory agenda later turned to other methodological issues, such as the benefits of a society- rather than state-centred approach to the state, and towards substantive topics, such as the future of the capitalist state in an era of globalization, the nature of the European Union, and 'empire' as a new form of political domination.[1] Interest in state theory was also weakened by fascination with the apparently anti-state-theoretical (or, at least, anti-Marxist) implications of Foucault's work on the micro-physics of power and on governmentality.[2] My contribution revisits the Poulantzas-Miliband debate, clarifies its stakes as far as its main participants were concerned, and offers a new reading of its significance for theoretical and empirical analyses of the state. For the issues in dispute were seriously misunderstood, including by its two key figures, who seem to have engaged in a dialogue of the deaf. Moreover, in clarifying these issues, we can better understand the state's recent restructuring and reorientation.

Possible objects of state theory

Everyday language sometimes depicts the state as a subject – the state does, or must do, this or that; and sometimes as a thing – this economic

class, social stratum, political party, or official caste uses the state to pursue its own projects or interests. But how could the state act *as if* it were a unified subject and what could constitute its unity as a 'thing'? Coherent answers are hard because the state's referents vary so much. It changes shape and appearance with the activities that it undertakes, the scales on which it operates, the political forces acting towards it, the circumstances in which it and they act, and so on. When pressed, a common response is to list the institutions that comprise the state, usually with a core set of institutions with increasingly vague outer boundaries. Miliband took this line in *The State in Capitalist Society* (1969). This began with an ostensive definition of key governmental institutions as 'the government, the administration, the military and the police, the judicial branch, sub-central government and parliamentary assemblies' (1969, p. 54); and went on to explore the role of anti-socialist parties, the mass media, educational institutions, trade union leaders and other forces in civil society in securing the hegemony of the dominant classes (pp. 180–211, 220–7; cf. 1977b, pp. 47–50). He adopted a similar approach in *Capitalist Democracy in Britain* (1982), which illustrates his general arguments about the state in capitalist society from the British case. Because of the vague outer limits of the state and its agents, such lists typically fail to specify what lends these institutions the quality of statehood.[3] Miliband solved this problem by identifying the state's essential function as defence of the dominant class (1969, p. 3; 1977b, pp. 55, 66–7) and specifying four functions that must always be performed, even if the manner of their delivery may vary (1977b, pp. 90–106).

One escape route from functionalism is to define the state in terms of means rather than ends. This approach informed Weber's celebrated definition of the *modern* state in terms of its distinctive *constitutionalized* monopoly of coercion within a given territorial area. This does not mean that modern states exercise power largely through direct and immediate coercion – this would be a sign of crisis or state failure – but rather that coercion is their last resort in enforcing binding decisions. For, where state power is widely deemed legitimate, it can normally secure compliance without force. Yet all states reserve the right – or claim the need – to suspend the constitution or specific legal provisions in exceptional circumstances (Poulantzas, 1978, pp. 76–86) and many states resort to force, fraud, and corruption to pursue their goals (cf. Miliband, 1969, pp. 88–94, 169–71; 1983e, pp. 82–94; Poulantzas, 1978, pp. 29, 80). Moreover, as Gramsci emphasized, not only do states exercise power through intellectual and moral leadership but coercion

can also be exercised on its behalf by forces that lie outside and beyond the state (e.g., paramilitary gangs of *fascisti*) (Gramsci, 1971, *passim*).

Building on Weber and his contemporaries, other theorists regard the essence of the state (pre-modern and modern) as the territorialization of political authority. This involves the intersection of politically organized coercive and symbolic power, a clearly demarcated core territory, and a fixed population on which political decisions are collectively binding. Thus the key feature of the state is the historically variable ensemble of technologies and practices that produce, naturalize, and manage territorial space as a bounded container within which political power is then exercised to achieve various, more or less well-integrated, and changing policy objectives. A system of formally sovereign, mutually recognizing, mutually legitimating national states exercising sovereign control over large and exclusive territorial areas is only a relatively recent institutional expression of state power. Other modes of territorializing political power have existed, some still co-exist with the Westphalian system (allegedly set up by the Treaties of Westphalia in 1648 but realized only stepwise during the 19th and 20th centuries), new expressions are emerging, and yet others can be imagined. The changing forms of the state were important themes in the later work of Miliband (1975, 1983e) and Poulantzas (1978).

An important approach to the complexity of the state is the argument that the state is polymorphous (Mann, 1986) or polycontextual (Willke, 1992). It changes shape and appearance with the political forces acting toward it and the conditions in which they act. Polymorphy means that the state's organization and capacities may be primarily capitalist, military, theocratic, or democratic in nature according to the balance of forces, especially as these affect the state ensemble and its exercise of power. Its dominant crystallization is open to challenge and will vary conjuncturally. Much the same point is made when Taylor distinguishes between the state as a capitalist state ('wealth container'), a military-political apparatus ('power container'), a nation-state ('cultural container'), and a welfare state ('social container') (Taylor, 1994). To this, we could add the state as a patriarchal state ('the patriarch general').

This approach implies that not all states in a capitalist society can be described as capitalist states, i.e., as states that are primarily organized to promote accumulation. Indeed, it suggests potential tensions between alternative crystallizations of state power in modern societies. There is no guarantee that the modern state will always (or ever) be essentially capitalist and, even when accumulation is deeply embedded in their

organizational matrix, modern states typically consider other functional demands and pressures from civil society when promoting institutional integration and social cohesion. Whether it succeeds in this regard is another matter. Adopting this approach entails looking at actually existing state formations as polyvalent, polymorphous crystallizations of different principles of societal organization. State power networks can crystallize in different ways according to the dominant issues in a given period or conjuncture, with general crystallizations dominating long periods and more specific crystallizations emerging in particular situations. It is on this basis that one can distinguish the *capitalist type of state* from the *state in capitalist society*. This distinction is already present in Marx and Engels and is most starkly expressed in the first major state-theoretical texts of Poulantzas and Miliband – with the former focusing on the historical specificity of the capitalist type of state and Miliband on the political sociology of the state in capitalist society.

Marxist approaches to the state

Marx's and Engels's work on the state comprises diverse philosophical, theoretical, journalistic, partisan, *ad hominem*, or purely *ad hoc* comments (cf. Miliband, 1965b, 1977b, pp. 2–6; Poulantzas, 1973a, pp. 19–23). This is reflected in the weaknesses of later Marxist state theories, both analytically and practically, and has prompted many attempts to produce a more comprehensive and systematic Marxist theory of the state based on more or less selective interpretations of their writings and those of other classical Marxists. Miliband and Poulantzas both made such efforts (Miliband, 1965b, 1977b; Poulantzas, 1973a, pp. 19–28; 1978). Their work was part of the general revival of Marxist interest in the state during the 1960s and 1970s, which arose in response to the state's apparent ability to manage the postwar economy in advanced capitalist societies and to the 'end of ideology' that allegedly resulted from postwar prosperity. Thus Marxists argued that the state retained its class nature as a crucial factor in securing economic, political and ideological class domination and that, despite the postwar boom, contemporary states could not suspend capital's contradictions and crisis-tendencies. Poulantzas (1973a) and Miliband (1969) both contributed to the first line of argument and Poulantzas's later studies also played an important role in the second current (especially 1975, 1978).

Some indications for developing a Marxist theory of the state are found in Marx's *1857 Introduction* (1973) and *Capital* (1967). Both works pursue a dual movement from abstract to concrete and from

simple to complex analyses with the intention of reproducing the 'real-concrete' as a 'concrete-in-thought'. The former movement involves a stepwise concretization of abstract concepts, unfolding their full implications as he moves towards ever more concrete analyses; the latter movement involves the articulation of concepts drawn from different axes of abstraction so that the analysis, whilst remaining integrated, becomes more multi-dimensional. Marx applied this approach in the first instance in his form analysis of capital as a social relation. Such an analysis studies social forms as modes of organizing social life. Marx focused primarily on the commodity form and value form in capitalism but also offered hints about the state form, especially in his earlier critique of Hegel's philosophy of right and his later comments on the Civil War in France (Marx, 1975a, 1975b, 1986b). His work in this regard can be described as form-analytic because it addresses the principles of statehood (*Staatlichkeit*), the generic form of the state (*Staat als Form*), particular state forms associated with different modes of production (*Staatsformen*), and the formal, material, and functional adequacies of specific forms and types of state. Linking this approach with the analysis of forms of life would provide a good account of the *social formation* (an ensemble of social forms) and its accompanying *social order* (considered as an ensemble of forms of life).

Marx often deploys the notion of formal adequacy in his critique of political economy. Formal adequacy refers to the correspondence among different forms of the capital relation such that different forms are mutually compatible and together provide the best framework for realizing the overall dynamic of capital accumulation. A well-known example is Marx's analysis of machinofacture as the adequate form of the capitalist labour process in contrast to simple or complex cooperation within manufacture. For, whereas capital can secure nominal control over labour-power in the manufacturing division of labour, in machinofacture the worker becomes an appendage to the machine and is really subsumed under capitalist control. Thus Marx concludes that machinofacture is the labour process that is formally adequate to the capitalist wage relation. In the same way, he examined money both as the adequate form (or medium) of expression of value in exchange in contrast to *ad hoc* barter relations and, further, as the most adequate form of capital in so far as money capital is available for investment in any activity as opposed to particular assets that must be valorized according to specific temporalities in specific places. For present purposes, we may also note that Marx regarded bourgeois democracy as the adequate form of political organization in consolidated capitalist social formations.

For Marx, the *form* of the modern (capitalist) state is distinguished above all by its institutional separation from the economy. The former is the world of the *citoyen* and national interest, the latter of the *bourgeois* and the primacy of private profit. He adds that the modern representative state based on rational bureaucracy and universal suffrage is formally adequate to capitalist social formations. The capitalist type of state has a distinctive, form-determined strategic selectivity with major implications for the organization and effectiveness of state intervention. This is reflected in Moore's aphorism that brilliantly distills the essence of the Marxist theory of the capitalist type of state: 'when exploitation takes the form of exchange, dictatorship tends to take the form of democracy' (Moore, 1957, p. 85; cf. Lenin's claim that the bourgeois democratic republic is 'the best possible political shell for capitalism', 1970, p. 296). The liberal democratic state form corresponds to the value form of the capitalist mode of production and provides a suitable extra-economic support for it. The freedom of economic agents to engage in exchange (belied by the factory despotism within the labour process) is matched by the freedom of individual citizens (belied by the state's subordination to the logic of capital) (Marx, 1975b, 1978; cf. Artous, 1999; Jessop, 1990). Nonetheless, the absence of direct control by the capitalist class over the state means that the development of state projects and policies that favour capital is subject to complex mediations. This means that the normal (or bourgeois democratic) form of capitalist state serves both to promote the interests of capital and to disguise this, rendering capitalist political domination relatively intransparent. When a normal type of capitalist state is established, political class domination is secured through the dull routines of democratic politics as the state acts on behalf of capital, but not at its direct behest (cf. Miliband 1983e, 64). Open class struggle (or, as Miliband puts it, 'class war') is less evident in such states and democratic political legitimacy is correspondingly stronger (contrast Miliband's accounts of the coup in Chile, 1983e, pp. 82–94, and of fascism, 1977b, pp. 56, 171; cf. Poulantzas, 1978, pp. 80–2).

Nonetheless formal adequacy does not guarantee the material adequacy of the capitalist type of state in the sense that the mere presence of this state form ensures that it secures the economic and extra-economic reproduction demands of the capitalist mode of production. On the contrary, extending the argument that form problematizes function (Offe, 1984; Jessop, 1984), we can say that *formal adequacy problematizes functional adequacy*. Because forms are the strategically selective medium through which the contradictions and dilemmas of

the capital relation develop, there is a permanent tension between form and content. This tension calls for action to ensure that form and content complement each other and are thereby functional for capital accumulation and political class domination. This excludes any quasi-automatic reproduction of the capital relation. This problem may be overcome in the short term through trial-and-error experimentation; and it may be solved in the medium to long term through the mutual selection and retention of complementary forms and contents. Those policies will be selected that correspond best to the dominant forms; and forms will be selected that are most adequate to the overall logic of capital accumulation. In short, content is selected by form, form is selected by content. Gramsci makes a similar point regarding the development of historical blocs, where 'material forces are the content and ideologies are the form, though this distinction between form and content has purely didactic value' (1971, p. 377). In this process, form and content are transformed from arbitrary elements into solid moments of a relatively coherent social formation. The resulting contingency in the nature of the state and its operations requires more concrete, historically specific, institutionally sensitive, and action-oriented studies. A formal analysis is not a superficial analysis: it is an analysis of social forms and their material effects – form really does make a difference! But it makes a difference only in and through its articulation with a social agency that can overflow, undermine, and overthrow forms.

Formal adequacy can be contrasted with functional adequacy. Whereas the former is more relevant to the analysis of the capitalist type of state (defined by its formal adequacy even if its form renders its immediate functionality problematic), the latter is more directly relevant to the analysis of the state in capitalist societies (where form itself is problematic and more emphasis is given to how the political process defines and secures the functional needs of capital) (Table 7.1). In this context, functional adequacy concerns the capacity of a state in capitalist society to secure the economic and extra-economic conditions for accumulation in a given conjuncture. Here the emphasis falls less on form and more on how policies come to acquire a particular content, mission, aims, and objectives that are more or less adequate to the reproduction requirements of the capital relation. This does not mean that the state form is irrelevant but rather that its strategic selectivities do not directly serve to realize the interests of capital in general. Analyses of the state must therefore pay more attention to the open struggle among political forces to shape the political process in ways that privilege accumulation over other modes of societalization.

Table 7.1 Capitalist Type of State versus State in Capitalist Society

	Capitalist Type of State	State in Capitalist Society
Historical specificity	Focus on historical specificity (distinction between capitalist type of state and types of state associated with other modes of production)	Potential historical continuity (focus on how inherited state forms may be used in new historical contexts)
Dominant axis of societalization	Dominance of logic of capital accumulation	Another axis of crystallization or none dominates
Key approach to its development	Focus on formal constitution (how state acquires 'formal adequacy') and on how 'form problematizes function'	Focus on historical constitution (how state building is mediated through the changing balance of forces oriented to different state projects)
Measure of adequacy	Formal adequacy (Correspondence between state form and other forms of capital relation such that state form is a key element in its overall reproduction)	Functional adequacy (Focus on capacity of state in a capitalist society to secure various conditions for capital accumulation and political legitimacy)
Class vs state power	Class power is structural and obscure. Capitalist type of state is more likely to function for capital as a whole and depends less on overt class struggles to guide its functionality	Class power is instrumental and transparent. There is a stronger likelihood that the state is used to pursue the interests of particular capitals or other specific interests
Periodization	Phases in formal development, crises in and of the capitalist type of state, alternation of normal and exceptional periods	Phases in historical development, major shifts in institutional design, changes in governments and policies

An alternative and equally venerable approach to state theory is found in Marx's more concrete-complex analyses of political class struggle. Exemplary texts here are his comments on *Class Struggle in France* (1964 and 1978) and, more importantly, the much-cited but frequently misunderstood *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1979), which analyses class struggles on the terrain of a changing state

in a still emerging capitalist social formation. These studies combine a critical theory of the state, a critique of class power, and a periodization of the state and political domination. In this context they dissect the state as an institutional ensemble and offer conjunctural analyses of the prevailing balance of forces, demonstrating thereby the variability of the state's relative autonomy and its functional adequacy in promoting class domination and securing capitalist reproduction in the face of class struggles. These studies also explore the nature and significance of exceptional regimes and the limits of the state's relative autonomy. Such analyses are far closer to studies of the state in capitalist societies than the capitalist type of state. For, while Marx shows how the changing form of the French state and different political regimes privilege one or another class fraction or social category, he focuses on efforts to refashion its instrumentality and functionality. These may occur on behalf of capital and other dominant classes or be made by a political elite that manages to play different classes off against each other in order to enhance its own autonomy and to promote the state's interests against the wider society (in addition to the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, see especially Marx, 1986a).

A further line of theoretical inquiry in Marx's texts on France is the historical constitution of the state, i.e., the process of state formation or state-building. A formally adequate capitalist state does not emerge automatically or immediately from the development of bourgeois relations of production. On the contrary, the state forms through which the political interests of capital are initially pursued are formally inadequate and must be conformed to its changing economic and political interests through open political struggles aimed at achieving a modern representative state. This is stated especially clearly in the *Communist Manifesto*:

> Each of these stages of the development of the bourgeoisie was accompanied by a corresponding political advance. From an oppressed class under the rule of feudal lords, to armed and self-administering associations within the medieval city, here an independent urban republic, there a third estate taxable by the monarchy, then in the era of small-scale manufacture a counterweight to the nobility in the estates-system or in an absolute monarchy, in general the mainstay of the great monarchies, the bourgeoisie – with the establishment of large-scale industry and the world market – has finally gained exclusive political control through the modern representative state. The power of the modern state is merely a device for administering the common

> affairs of the whole bourgeois class (Marx and Engels, 1976a, p. 486).

This suggests that the study of the historical constitution of the state in capitalist societies and its instrumentalization for capitalist purposes is far from identical with the study of its formal constitution as a capitalist type of state with structurally-inscribed strategic selectivities that quasi-automatically privilege the interests of capital. It has taken many economic, political, and ideological struggles, extensive trial-and-error experimentation, and the mobilization of many different social forces to develop the modern representative state. Unsurprisingly, given the contradiction at the heart of the democratic constitution, this is also a fragile political regime. For its stability depends on the continued willingness of the dominated classes to accept only political emancipation rather than press for social emancipation and/or on the willingness of the dominant class(es) to be satisfied with social domination (i.e., with the *de facto* subordination of the exercise of state power to the imperatives of capital accumulation) rather than press for the restoration of their earlier monopoly of political power (cf. Marx, 1978). Rejection of this compromise creates fertile ground for the growth of exceptional forms of state, i.e., states where the electoral principle is suspended and some part of the state apparatus exercises power without the need to take account of the bourgeois democratic process.

Poulantzas's analysis of the capitalist type of state

Having considered some basic approaches and concepts for a Marxist analysis of the state, we can now sketch the background of the Poulantzas-Miliband debate. In his first major contribution to Marxist state theory, *Political Power and Social Classes* (published in French in 1968, in English in 1973), Poulantzas introduced the notion of the capitalist type of state, which is formally adequate to capitalism and thereby routinizes and disguises economic and political class domination. He implicitly distinguished this normal type of state from states in capitalist societies, which are formally inadequate and therefore depend far more on constant political improvisation and on force-fraud-corruption to secure such domination. Poulantzas also distinguished between historical and formal constitution in his account of the transition to capitalism, where he analyses a number of state forms that function more or less adequately to effect that transition but do not themselves have a capitalist form (e.g., mercantilist and absolutist

states or, later, Bismarckism) (1973a, pp. 157–83). His later work will develop sophisticated analyses of the different institutional and political logics of normal and exceptional states and political regimes (cf. Jessop, 1985).

His first major state-theoretical analysis had four main objectives:

> (1) To systematize the studies of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Gramsci and their implications for revolutionary strategy. This involved an active 'symptomatic reading' in which texts are not read literally and superficially but for their underlying conceptual innovations, ambivalence, lacunae, and so forth and for their theoretical as well as empirical adequacy.
> (2) To criticize other Marxist approaches to the state. Chief among these were: (i) economic reductionism that emphasized the logic of capitalist development or economic class struggles at the expense of the specifically political dimensions of the state and state power; (ii) the 'historicism' (or history-making voluntarism) of those who emphasized the transformative potential of an autonomous political class struggle without regard to the strategically selective institutional legacies of political structures; and (iii) 'state monopoly capitalism' views, which claimed that power in the contemporary state was exercised exclusively by monopoly capital at the expense of other capitalist groups as well as the subaltern classes.
> (3) To ground a new, separate Marxist science of capitalist politics in basic Marxist philosophical and theoretical principles; and
> (4) To develop this new Marxist political science in three steps by moving from more abstract to more concrete analyses and, to a lesser extent, from the simple to the complex.

These aims are all reflected in the division of his book into three parts, which, respectively, present general theoretical considerations about the state and politics, analyse the institutional form of the capitalist state, and examine the dynamics of political class struggle. Each part drew in turn on different theoretical sources in the Marxist literature and in broader studies of the modern state.

First, drawing on Althusser's so-called structural Marxism, he argued that an autonomous theory of the political region was possible for the capitalist mode of production because it was marked by an institutional separation between economics and politics. Second, given this possibility, he drew on basic concepts of juridico-political theory to describe the distinctive institutional matrix of the capitalist type of

state. He described it as a hierarchically organized, centrally-coordinated, sovereign territorial state based on the rule of law and, in its ideal typical normal form, combined with a bourgeois democratic form of government. This state form facilitates capital accumulation and political class domination but obscures this fact by disguising this economic exploitation and the exercise of class power. Third, in the final part of his book, he drew on Gramsci to argue that, in such a state, political class domination could not rest on a legal monopoly of class power but would depend on the dominant class's capacity to promote a hegemonic project that identified the national-popular interest with the long-term interests of the capitalist class and its allies in the power bloc. Such hegemonic projects were premised on the individuation of the political subjects (citizens) of a state based on the rule of law and would aim to link individual interests with national-popular interest.

In developing this analysis, Poulantzas moved from abstract-simple to concrete-complex concepts. Thus, beginning with general concepts of dialectical materialism as presented in structural Marxism, he successively deployed the basic concepts of historical materialism, concepts concerned with historically specific aspects of the capitalist mode of production (CMP), concepts for describing key features of a social formation that was dominated by the CMP, concepts appropriate to the political region within capitalism, concepts to identify the distinctive features of the capitalist type of state and the manner in which its distinctive form problematized its functionality for capitalist reproduction, and, finally, concepts to explore how this problematic functionality could be overcome through the successful adoption of specific forms of political action. For only when the state's narrow economic, political-administrative, and ideological functions are subordinated to its global political function (i.e., securing social cohesion in a class-divided society) can they contribute effectively to creating and maintaining capital's long-term domination. This global political function depends in turn on the successful pursuit of specific political practices concerned with organizing the power bloc and disorganizing subordinate classes, with the struggle for national-popular hegemony in democratic conditions having a vital role in this regard. Only by moving to this more concrete-complex level could Poulantzas turn from discussion of the formal adequacy of the capitalist type of state to a critical assessment of its functional adequacy and the latter's mediation through political practices undertaken by specific social forces.

Implicit in Poulantzas's analysis are two crucial state-theoretical concepts: 'formal adequacy' and 'strategic selectivity'. The first concept is

premised on form analysis (see above) and, for Poulantzas, involves the adequacy of a given state form for securing political class domination in specific circumstances. A preliminary form-analytical account of the capitalist type of state is presented in Table 7.2, which is based on the work of Poulantzas and other form-analytical studies (see also Jessop, 2002). Nonetheless form analysis cannot exhaust analysis of structures – there are emergent structural properties that cannot be reduced to the properties of any one form or combination of forms and there is a constant tendency for action to overflow any given form and its associated constraints. This is reflected in Poulantzas's subsequent claim that the state is a social relation. This elliptical phrase implies that the exercise of state power (or, better, state powers in the plural) involves a form-determined condensation of the changing balance of forces in struggle. The same claim is implicit in his first major work with its stress on the institutional separation and relative autonomy of the political region, the specificity of the sovereign territorial democratic state as an institutional matrix for the organization and mediation of politics, and the need for a distinctive form of political class struggle in normal capitalist states that would be oriented to securing political hegemony. This implies that the state *qua* institutional ensemble has a specific, differential impact on the ability of various political forces to pursue particular interests and strategies in specific spatio-temporal contexts through their access to and/or control over given state capacities – capacities that always depend for their effectiveness on links to forces and powers that exist and operate beyond the state's formal boundaries. Whether these links would be effective enough to secure hegemony would affect the stability of the capitalist type of state and, where the latter experienced a crisis (or crises), an exceptional regime was likely to emerge. Moreover, as Poulantzas later argued, if an overall strategic line is discernible in the exercise of these powers, it is due to strategic coordination enabled through the selectivity of the state system and the role of parallel power networks that cross-cut and unify its formal structures. Such unity is improbable, however, because the state is shot through with contradictions and class struggles and its political agents must always take account of (potential) mobilization by a wide range of forces beyond the state, engaged in struggles to transform it, determine its policies, or simply resist it from afar (1973a, 1978).

Although *Political Power and Social Classes* did not examine exceptional regimes, i.e., those that suspend the principle of electoral representation as the basis for legitimacy, he did go on later to discuss their forms, the variation in their formal adequacy (fascism was more ade-

Table 7.2 Some Key Features of the Capitalist Type of State

Articulation of economy and state in capitalism	**Implications for the economy and class relations**	**Implications for the state and politics**
Institutional separation of market economy, sovereign state, and a public sphere (civil society) that is located beyond market and state.	Economy is organized under dominance of capitalist law of value as mediated through competition between capitals and economic class struggle	*Raison d'état* (a specialized political rationality) distinct from profit-and-loss market logic and from religious, moral, or ethical principles.
Legitimate or constitutionalized claim to a monopoly of organized coercion within territory controlled by state.	Coercion is excluded from immediate organization of labour process. Value form and market forces, not force, shape capital accumulation.	Specialized military-police organs are subject to constitutional control. Force has ideological as well as repressive functions.
Role of legality in legitimation of the state and its activities.		Subject to law, state may intervene to compensate for market failure in national interest.
'Tax State': state revenues derive largely from taxes on economic actors and their activities and from loans raised from market actors.	Taxes are deductions from private revenues but may be used to produce public goods deemed essential to market economy and/or for social cohesion.	Subjects of the state in its territory have general duty to pay taxes, regardless of whether they approve of specific state activities.
State lacks own property to produce goods and services for its own use and/or to sell to generate profits to support state apparatus and activities. Tax capacity depends on legal authority and coercive power.	Bourgeois tax form: general contribution to government revenue levied on continuing basis that can be appliedfreely by state to legitimate tasks – not specific, *ad hoc* taxes levied for specific tasks.	National money is also means of payment for state taxes. Taxation capacity acts as security for sovereign debt. Tax as one of earliest foci of class struggles.
Specialized administrative staff with own channels of recruitment, training, and *ésprit de corps*. This staff is subject to the authority of the political	State occupies specific place in general division between manual and mental labour. Officials and political class specialize in intellectual	Official discourse has key role in exercise of state power. Public and private intellectuals formulate state and hegemonic projects that

Table 7.2 Some Key Features of the Capitalist Type of State – *continued*

Articulation of economy and state in capitalism	Implications for the economy and class relations	Implications for the state and politics
executive. It forms a social category divided by market and status position.	labour with close relationship between their specialized knowledge and their power. Knowledge becomes major basis of state's capacities.	define the national and/or 'national-popular' interest. State derives its legitimacy by reflecting national and/or 'national-popular' interest.
State based on rule of law: division between private law, administrative law, and public law. International law governs relations between states. No formal monopoly of political power in hands of dominant economic class(es) but 'equality before the law'.	Economic subjects are formally free and equal owners of commodities, including labour-power. Private law developed on basis of property rights and contract law. State has a key role in securing external conditions for economic exchange.	Formal subjects of state are individuals with citizenship rights, not feudal estates or collective economic classes. Struggles to extend these rights play a key role in the expansion of state activities. Public law organized around the individual-state, public-private, and the national-international distinctions.
Formally sovereign state with distinct and exclusive territorial domain in which it is free to act without interference from other states.	Conflict between economy as abstract 'space of flows' in world market and as sum of localized activities, with an inevitably politically-overdetermined character.	Ideally, the state is recognized as sovereign in this territory by other states but may need to defend its territorial integrity by force.
Substantively, states are constrained in exercise of sovereignty by balance of international forces.	Particular capitals may seek support in world competition from their respective states	Political and military rivalry is conditioned by strength of national economy.

This table presents key formal features of capitalist type of state, starting from the basic institutional separation of the economy as a profit-oriented, market-mediated, socially disembedded sphere of activities and the political system as a collective goal attainment-oriented, juridico-politically mediated, and socially disembedded sphere of political activities. This separation is both *real* and *illusory*. There are distinct economic and political systems, with own operational logics that can prove contradictory, etc.; but the two systems are interdependent, structurally coupled, and co-evolving. The main point behind the table is, then, to note differences, tensions, and points of convergence.
Source: Jessop (2002) pp. 38–9.

quate than military dictatorships, for example) and their functional limitations. Nonetheless his failure to extend his analysis in this way in his first major state-theoretical text was one of the key criticisms subsequently levelled against him by Miliband (see below). Equally neglected were dependent capitalist states – a topic he later discussed in relation to Southern Europe's military dictatorships (1976a). Finally, for all his interest in the *formal adequacy* of the capitalist type of state, there is a residual functionalist aspect to Poulantzas's work at this stage. For his analysis of the capitalist type of state was primarily concerned to show how it was possible for an institutionally separate, relatively autonomous state to secure the long-term political interests of capital rather than to show the problems that this separation must inevitably reproduce. This residual functionalism is reasserted in Poulantzas's response to Miliband's review of *Political Power and Social Classes* (Miliband, 1973a; Poulantzas, 1976).

Miliband's analysis of the *state in capitalist society*

Miliband's contribution to Marxist state theory draws more on the second approach to the state developed by Marx and Engels, that is, a concern with the historical constitution of the state in capitalist societies and the changing modalities of class struggles concerned to capture the existing state and use it to promote particular class interests. His most famous state-theoretical work (1969) shares the concern of his earlier work on the limits of parliamentary socialism (1961, cf. 1982, pp. 20–53) with theoretically-informed empirical analysis rather than pursuing the sort of theoretical reflection and conceptual elaboration typical of Poulantzas's early work (for Miliband's motives in starting his work on the state and his subsequent reliance on 'a mixture of history and political experience and analysis', see Newman, 2002, pp. 186–8). Thus the four main goals of *The State in Capitalist Society* were:

> (1) To develop a new Marxist approach to the state in capitalist society without much explicit or detailed reference to earlier Marxist work, its strengths, or limits.
> (2) To criticize bourgeois political science, especially its recent claims about the separation of ownership and control produced by the managerial revolution and its continuing claims about the open, pluralistic, and democratic nature of government in the modern democratic state.

(3) To develop his own account of the state through a critique of bourgeois common sense and/or bourgeois social science based on detailed examination of empirical data and a more general presentation of a theoretically-informed (but markedly 'theory-light') alternative account of how different government institutions and actors are deeply embedded in a capitalist market economy and a civil society dominated by institutions and forces imbued with capitalist values and more or less committed to capitalist interests.
(4) To present this critique of bourgeois political science and common sense in a revelatory manner that starts from surface appearances and moves progressively to more basic underlying factors and forces.

This approach is reflected in the overall organization of Miliband's cathartic text. His critique moves from empirical analysis of managerial and political elite recruitment through an account of the actual functions of specific parts of the state apparatus to more basic material and ideological constraints on the state's autonomy regardless of elite backgrounds and the aims and objectives of the elected politicians and state managers nominally in charge of the state. In this sense, while Poulantzas tends to move from the most abstract determinations of the capitalist state to its more concrete form and dynamics, Miliband tends to move from more 'visible' aspects of capitalist societies to some of their more hidden ('behind the scenes' or 'behind the backs') aspects and/or to some fundamental structural constraints on the exercise of state power in a capitalist society, whatever the state's specific institutional form.

The basic political assumption informing Miliband's analysis is that there cannot be a parliamentary road to socialism because the bourgeois democratic state (and, by extension, other types of political regime in capitalist social formations) will remain inherently unreformable as long as radical movements continue to work only in and through established political institutions. His aim is to reveal the flaws in such a reformist approach and to develop theoretical ideas useful for a more radical democratic socialist movement. Nonetheless, in developing this analysis, he tends to reproduce some of the instrumentalist fallacies of parliamentary socialism even as he seeks to show the limits of a simple instrumentalist analysis of the state apparatus. Thus he is quite clear that the state is a 'special institution, whose main purpose is to defend the predominance … of a particular class' (1969, p. 3) that extends well beyond the executive and legislative branches of elected government (1969, pp. 49–50, 54). And he proposes to 'examine the state in light of concrete socio-economic *and* political *and* cultural reality of capitalist

societies' (1969, p. 6) in order to reveal the basic limits to reformist attempts to use legislative powers alone to transform the basic structures of capitalist exploitation and domination.

On this basis he first describes the linkages between economic elites and the dominant class, showing that managers are not so much salaried employees as key members of the dominant economic class. He then explores the composition of the state elite (state managers in contemporary jargon) and state servants, paying special attention to their class background and current class interests and class consciousness. His next step is to show that, while democracy certainly involves elections and opposition, the political system in contemporary capitalism is marred by imperfect party and class competition. He then studies the bases of legitimation in the political system and the pressures on state managers to seek re-election and continued legitimacy on the basis of criteria that are biased towards capitalist interests. And his analysis of the state in capitalist societies ends with a broader analysis of the bases of political authority in a civil society dominated by capitalist values in the family, school, mass media, and many other institutions. In all these analyses, Miliband focuses on how the embedding of a formally democratic state in a substantively capitalist society limits the apparent autonomy of elected governments and thereby promotes the functional adequacy of the exercise of state power for and on behalf of capital. This is far from a simple instrumentalist account of the state because it emphasizes a wide range of constraints on any voluntarist exercise of power but it is nonetheless one that starts from the existence of historically constituted political regimes in actually existing capitalist societies. This involves a different theoretical object and different lines of argument from those in the work of his protagonist in the ensuing Poulantzas-Miliband controversy.

The Poulantzas-Miliband non-debate

The relative autonomy of the state was much disputed in the 1970s and 1980s. Essentially this topic concerned the relative freedom of the state (or better, state managers) to pursue policies that conflict with the immediate interests of the dominant economic class(es) without becoming so autonomous that they could also undermine the long-term economic and political interests of the latter. This was one of the key themes in the Poulantzas-Miliband debate, which took place between a purported structural determinist and an alleged instrumentalist respectively. Neither characterization is accurate but it remains to explain

why the two protagonists were unable to grasp and depict their opponent's stance within the controversy. I suggest that this was because they conceived the capitalist state in such radically different and fundamentally incommensurable terms that they were actually discussing two different types of theoretical object. This misunderstanding was reinforced because the two men also adopted different strategies for presenting their respective objects. Poulantzas was essentially concerned with the formal adequacy of the capitalist type of state and Miliband with the functional adequacy of the state in a capitalist society (for an alternative reading of the debate, see Barrow, 2002). Paradoxically, without recognizing these differences or admitting the impact of this non-debate on their subsequent state-theoretical analyses, both figures later redefined their respective theoretical objects and developed new accounts that not only broke with their earlier views but even produced a limited bilateral convergence.

Poulantzas initiated the debate with an extended critique of Miliband's book in *New Left Review* (1969). His five main criticisms were that: (1) Miliband was mistaken in his belief that a Marxist approach could be based on a critique of non-Marxist approaches that focused on revealing their factual errors – this placed Miliband on their terrain and trapped him in a debate on their terms; (2) Miliband had adopted a 'problematic of the subject', i.e., a concern with individual agents and their motives rather than with classes and their interests; (3) these epistemological and theoretical errors are evident in Miliband's critique of the managerial revolution thesis and the alleged neutrality of the state bureaucracy; (4) Miliband neglected the distinctive class unity of the state apparatus and therefore also failed to inquire into the sources of this unity; and (5) Miliband had neglected the key role of the ideological state apparatuses' (ISAs) in securing social cohesion in a class-divided society. The main problems with this critique was that it criticized Miliband for failing to accomplish something that he did not aim to achieve and that it ignored the polemical value of what he did intend to write. This misunderstanding is rooted in part in the different theoretical and political contexts of their work, with Poulantzas writing in a context marked by relatively abstract theoretical debates and Marxist polemics on state monopoly capitalism and Miliband writing in a context dominated by Anglo-American empiricism and debates on pluralism.

Miliband replied to this critique twice. The first response was immediate and written hastily over a weekend. It made four main points: (1) Poulantzas was preoccupied with his own problematic to the exclusion of other approaches and ignored the importance of empirical

material in developing a critique of the state; (2) he was guilty of 'structural superdeterminism' in his exaggerated concern with the structural constraints on state autonomy; (3) given his claim that the capitalist type of state tends to be 'Bonapartist', i.e., to acquire a certain independence from the social forces in the wider society, Poulantzas could not distinguish between fascism and democracy and therefore could not appreciate the virtues of a democratic regime for democratic struggle; (4) he was mistaken in treating ISAs as part of the state in its narrow sense as opposed to the political system more generally (Miliband 1970a). This reply shows signs of haste in being more concerned to rebut Poulantzas's specific charges than ask about the appropriate object of a Marxist state theory. Thus, in focusing on the structural Marxist language in which Poulantzas phrased his criticisms, Miliband ignored the more fundamental difference of theoretical and empirical object in their respective approaches. This initial exchange set the tone for the broader reception of the debate and its misrepresentation (including by its main protagonists) as a conflict between structuralist and instrumentalist accounts of the same analytical object. Yet, as argued above, Poulantzas was concerned with the capitalist type of state, Miliband with the state in capitalist societies.

Miliband's second reply critically reviewed the English translation of Poulantzas's book in the context of their earlier exchange. Thus he still failed to identify the specific theoretical object of Poulantzas's text and its implications for the latter's distinctive method of presentation and resulting tripartite theoretical structure. Instead Miliband comments on the importance of the anti-economist intention of Poulantzas's book, accuses him of a 'structuralist abstractionism' that has little contact with reality and produces little more than a 'formalized ballet of evanescent shadows', and claims that economism re-enters Poulantzas's analysis through the backdoor in the guise of the inevitable class character of state power. Miliband also returns to the theme of normal and exceptional states by noting that Poulantzas exaggerates the unity of the state and cannot deal with the role of political parties or the variability of regimes – especially as this is seen in the distinction between democracy and fascism. This critique still bears the imprint of the first exchange between Miliband and Poulantzas, focusing on only one aspect of Poulantzas's theoretical matrix (the use of Althusser's structural Marxist terminology to justify an autonomous theory of political institutions and practices) to the neglect of its substantively more important utilization of juridico-political concepts and Gramsci's analysis of hegemony. This reinforces the unfortunate polarization in the debate

around structuralism *versus* instrumentalism and reproduces the failure to distinguish between an abstract theoretical concern with the capitalist type of state and an empirical analysis of the state in capitalist society as a real-concrete phenomenon. Poulantzas had criticized Miliband for not taking the capitalist type of state as his theoretical object and for situating his critique of the state in capitalist society on the theoretical terrain of pluralism. Miliband now criticized Poulantzas in turn for not examining actually existing states in capitalist societies and for his 'hyper-theoretical' concerns with the essence of the capitalist state, neglecting its variant forms and the ways in which class struggles shape state power.

The different presentational strategies adopted in the two books also contributed to the excess of heat over light in this polemic. As we have seen, Miliband began with the social origins and current interests of economic and political elites and then turned to more fundamental features of actually existing states in a capitalist society and the constraints on their autonomy. Conversely, Poulantzas began with the overall institutional framework of capitalist societies, defined the ideal-typical capitalist type of state (a constitutional democratic state based on the rule of law), then explored the typical forms of political class struggle in bourgeois democracies (concerned with winning active consent for a national-popular project), and concluded with an analysis of the relative autonomy of state managers. In short, whereas Miliband moved from elites as social categories to broader social forces and only then to structural factors, Poulantzas moved from structural factors to the struggle among social forces and then to specific social categories. Such presentational strategies encouraged a polarized view of the debate that did little justice to the two texts because it drew attention to their starting points rather than to the full set of arguments and their implicit as well as explicit theoretical logic.

The next round was initiated by Ernesto Laclau, an Argentinian social theorist familiar with Althusserian structuralism who was also aware of the complexities of political struggles. He attacked both writers on the grounds that they had made complementary methodological errors. While Miliband had erred in not constructing his own theory and testing it against other theories, Poulantzas had constructed his own theory but neglected to demonstrate its superiority on empirical grounds. This is correct as far as it goes but Laclau himself did not identify the very different theoretical objects that would have been constructed and tested if Miliband and Poulantzas had followed his own protocols of theory construction and empirical evaluation. Laclau

made some additional points about the autonomy of the political and its relation to the economic that need not concern us here (Laclau, 1975).

This prompted the final round in the debate as Poulantzas replied to both Laclau and Miliband. He agrees in part with Laclau's critique and then focuses on Miliband. Poulantzas denies the charge of abstractionism, as well he might, given his concern to move from abstract to concrete, but does plead guilty to using difficult language, to formalism (in this context, not a concern with forms but the use of terms that lack immediate empirical referents), and to 'theoreticism'. This last deviation involves an emphasis on the conditions of theoretical production to the neglect of how the 'real' world is reflected in theory. He also concedes that this leads him to use empirical analysis for illustration rather than for systematic testing of arguments. After these concessions, Poulantzas went on the attack. He claims to analyse the relative autonomy of state in terms of the institutional separation of economics and politics and the state's key role in organizing a 'power bloc' and disorganizing the popular masses; and he rejects the charge of structuralism on the grounds that he also examines class struggle. Both points are valid and derive from the form-analytic, strategic-relational approach implicit in *Political Power and Social Classes*. Indeed, he then introduces his innovative view of the state as a social relation to emphasize even more the role of class struggle in the constitution of state power. In this context, he also notes the basic internal contradictions and tensions within the state apparatus that render its unity deeply problematic and how these are shaped by struggles within the state, over the state, and at a distance from the state. He also concedes the need to investigate the state's economic functions. Nowhere does Poulantzas recognize, however, as he had implicitly done earlier, that the state in capitalist societies may not be a capitalist type of state; and, for the latter, he insists, against his concession that systematic empirical testing is needed, that the logic and interests of capital will always prevail in the long run (Poulantzas, 1976).

A possible reconciliation?

In a provocative comparison of the popular impact of Marx and Darwin, Marsden notes that both men published their key scientific work in 1867 and that Darwin's work was an instant success whilst Marx attracted little attention. He suggests that this is due to Darwin's mode of presentation in his *Origin of the Species*, which was written as

the history of a tentative discovery, expressed the author's own doubts, and implicitly invited the reader to help solve unresolved questions. In contrast, Marx's *Capital* failed because it was written as a definitive scientific treatise without adequately explaining how Marx had arrived at the truth. This discouraged readers from engaging with *Capital* quite so enthusiastically as they read *Origins* (Marsden, 1999, pp. 113–14).[4]

A similar comparison can be made with Poulantzas and Miliband. Each published his first major state-theoretical work just over a century later, with similar results. Miliband achieved far greater popular success because of the revelatory, cathartic impact of his state-theoretical detective story, unmasking the capitalist nature of the apparently democratic, class-neutral state in capitalist societies. In contrast, Poulantzas's analysis of the capitalist type of state appears more like 'a triumph of German *Wissenschaft*' insofar as it is modelled on Marx's movement from the most abstract determinations towards the concrete-in-thought and aims to be a definitive scientific treatise. In this sense, while Miliband's text was immediately accessible (and remains so, even if it is now dated), Poulantzas's text required considerable intellectual capital on the part of its readers and has become less accessible as the language of structural Marxism appears more alien. But this language is not an essential feature of his approach, as shown by its absence from Poulantzas's last, and most definitive, text on the state as a social relation (1976).

Following the first round in their debate, Poulantzas, having initially focused on the pure form of the capitalist type of state at a high level of abstraction, took more account of forms of state, varieties in political regime, changes in class composition and forms of struggle, the crucial distinction between normal and exceptional forms of state, and the value of democratic institutions in the struggle for democratic socialism. This brought him closer to Miliband. The latter in turn went on to provide interesting comments on the formal adequacy of liberal democracy for securing bourgeois hegemony and for enabling reorganization of bourgeois class domination on behalf (but not necessarily at the behest) of capital in a relatively flexible manner (1977b, pp. 87–8). There is also an interesting parallel between Poulantzas's relational turn and Miliband's later interest in a 'wider theory of domination, based on infra- and superstructural elements' with a primacy of class over state power (Miliband, 1977b, pp. 43–4). Moreover, reflecting major conjunctural shifts in the capitalist and soviet blocs, Poulantzas and Miliband did converge on a positive evaluation of democratic socialism, pluripartisme, the valuable role of new social movements, the importance of human rights, and the critique of authoritarian statism.

Given this, the Poulantzas-Miliband debate can be seen as an unnecessary diversion in their own theoretical trajectories as well as an unproductive debate for a generation of state theorists more generally. This is indicated in Miliband's later remarks that, 'taken as a whole', Poulantzas's work 'is without question the most creative and stimulating contribution to a Marxist political sociology[5] to have been made in the sixties and seventies' (1983e, p. 27); and, further, that Poulantzas provided 'the most thorough exploration of the concept of the autonomy of the state … [and] coined the formulation which has remained the basis for most subsequent discussion of the subject, namely the "relative autonomy of the state"' (1983e, p. 64). Such remarks might have provided a fruitful basis for discussion if made earlier, especially if Poulantzas's first critique had been less anxious to assert his structural Marxist credentials at Miliband's expense and more interested in the underlying theoretical logic and presentation of *The State in Capitalist Society*.

This does not mean that Poulantzas and Miliband converged fully in their analyses of the state. On the contrary, fundamental differences remained in their approaches to the philosophy of social science and the methodology of theory construction, with Poulantzas more concerned with abstract questions and theoretical coherence and Miliband more concerned with political relevance and empirical evidence. Important differences also remained in their approach to the object of state theory, with the Greek developing a form-analytic, strategic-relational perspective and the Belgian sticking to institutional analysis focused on the changing balance of forces. These differences are also reflected in their respective approaches to class analysis, to the political influence of state managers, and to other politically-relevant social forces (see especially Miliband 1983e, pp. 63–78); in their relative sensitivity to potential disjunctions between economics, politics, and the 'ideological' and their impact on the relative unity of capitalist social formations (see especially Poulantzas, 1974).

Conclusions: an emerging agenda?

This contribution starts from the distinction between the capitalist type of state and the state in capitalist society. This is radically different from the distinction that has conventionally framed this debate – including its perception and presentation by its chief protagonists as well as in subsequent interventions and comments. This is a common observation and has been explained in various ways (cf. Barrow, 2002). Whatever the reasons, this misperception produced a dialogue of the

deaf that not only proved sterile in its own terms but has also misled later generations about the best way to study the state. My own view, which has emerged from my reflections on Poulantzas and other advocates of a form-analytic, strategic-relational analysis, is that two analytical strategies must be adopted and combined. On the one hand, there is a definite place for *theoretical reflections* on the type of state that corresponds best to the capitalist mode of production; and, on the other, the most appropriate starting point for *empirical analysis* are various states in capitalist societies. Whereas the first approach is concerned with the formal adequacy of the capitalist type of state, the latter examines the functional adequacy of the state in capitalist society. Given that states are polymorphous and can operate with very different logics of societalization, there is no guarantee that a given state in capitalist society will have a capitalist character. This must be established theoretically and empirically on the basis of its specific forms, institutional architecture, and political practices – an exercise that requires both types of analysis. Such research must examine the outcome of practical struggles over the historical and formal constitution of the state, its institutional design, and the nature and purposes of government. Two complementary analytical strategies can be adopted in this regard: (a) how does the exercise of state power by the agents of the state in capitalist society overcome the problems of lobbyism, particularism, short-termism, fragmentation, etc., so that it can develop, if at all, policies that are consistent with the expanded reproduction of capital; and (b) how does the exercise of power in and through the capitalist type of state overcome the problems posed by the institutional separation of the economic and political through specific accumulation strategies, state projects, and hegemonic visions. The former strategy requires concern with formal adequacy (cf. Miliband, 1977b, pp. 74–83); the latter requires concern with functional adequacy (cf. Poulantzas, 1978, pp. 25, 53, 124–6, 132, 140–3, 190–4). Combining these approaches would avoid the state-theoretical pitfalls of both structuralism and instrumentalism by focusing on the *contingently necessary* nature of state power in the modern state. Its importance lies in its ability to bridge the distinction between the capitalist state and the state in capitalist society and to provide a basis for critical work on actually existing states in actually existing social formations.

Notes

1 On the consequences of this for the impoverishment of state theory, see Aronowitz and Bratsis (2002) and Panitch (2002).

2 For an argument that Foucault's work on governmentality was strongly state-theoretical, see Jessop, 2004; see also Foucault, 2004.

3 This is made even harder because, as Max Weber (1948) noted, there is no activity that states always perform and none they have never performed.
4 Of course, the fact that Darwin wrote in English and Marx in German may also have shaped these outcomes!
5 While Miliband might well be described as a political sociologist, Poulantzas would have rejected this identity for himself.