

Justice & Class Consciousness

A Theory of Political Transition

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Declaration

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the PhD degree of the London School of Economics and Political Science is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated that it is the work of others (in which case the extent of any work carried out jointly by me and any other person is clearly identified in it).

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Abstract

Many people feel that the stark political and economic divides which characterise contemporary capitalist societies are unjust. Political philosophers have responded to intuitions like these by defending a series of alternative institutional arrangements - social democracy, property-owning democracy, liberal socialism - which they claim could radically reduce these inequalities. What is currently missing from the now voluminous normative literature on alternatives to the political-economic status quo, however, is a theory of political transition: an account which specifies the actions that might play a desirable role, under present political conditions, in making a less starkly divided society of some kind a more realistic future prospect.

Justice & Class Consciousness argues that one particularly attractive strategy for realising a fairer economy (and a fairer world) is that of *raising class consciousness*. This idea is a familiar one in Marxist thought but is seldom invoked in contemporary debates about social justice, with many philosophers fearing that it relies on questionable class-reductionist assumptions or has little relevance in post-industrial economies. This thesis shows how a reframed conception of class consciousness - understood as a complex of robustly action-guiding beliefs and desires about power hierarchies in economic production - can overcome these worries. It also makes a case for why raising this type of class consciousness can be what it calls a "feasibility-enhancing outcome", increasing the chances of realising radical economic transformations. The final chapters then highlight the valuable role that political practices such as democratic municipalism, organising conversations, and activist-led education can play in effectively and permissibly achieving this raised consciousness.

The result is a partial answer to the familiar refrain which often greets proponents of a radically more just society: "but how do we get there?".

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Not me alone—
I know now—
But all the whole oppressed
Poor world,
White and black,
Must put their hands with mine
To shake the pillars of those temples
Wherein the false gods dwell
And worn-out altars stand
Too well defended,
And the rule of greed upheld—
That must be ended.

Langston Hughes, “Union”, 1931.

1

Rising Economic Inequality and the Need for a Theory of Political Transition

Sorry We Missed You, a 2019 film directed by Ken Loach and written by Paul Laverty, tells the story of Ricky Turner, a self-employed delivery driver and his partner, Abby, an agency social care nurse. Abby and Ricky lost their house as a result of the 2008 financial crisis and were subsequently forced back into rented accommodation. They have been racking up debts and working longer and longer hours ever since, as they try to make ends meet and provide for their two children. About halfway through the film, Loach shows us the two characters in bed, facing each other in the dark after another draining day:

RICKY:

I never thought it'd be this difficult, Abby... It just seems to me that everything is out of whack. You know what I mean?

ABBY:

Yeah, I have horrible dreams y'know. I'm like, sinking in the quicksand, and the kids are trying to pull us out with a branch, but... it just seems like the more we work and the more hours we do, we just sink further and further into this big hole. I have it all the time.

Many will share Ricky's view that there is something deeply out of whack with the way in which wealthy capitalist societies like the United Kingdom are currently structured. Whilst the characters of Abby and Ricky may be fictionalised, many millions of real people are currently struggling, just like them, to securely meet even their most basic needs, and feel themselves sinking further and further into quicksand. At the same time, a small section of economic elites, including the major shareholders and senior executives of the kinds of companies for which Ricky and Abby work, lead lives more and more disconnected from those at the bottom: hoovering up absurd annual bonuses, holidaying on superyachts, and with the kinds of cosy relationships with professional politicians to which we have become increasingly normalised.

A vast empirical literature also now exists which further affirms the widely shared feeling that this situation is undesirable, even unsustainable. Extreme economic disparities destabilise democracy - as the richest exert increasing control over political outcomes - and lead to forms of social stratification which take a severe toll on the mental wellbeing of the worst-off. Economic inequality has also been shown to play a key role in driving the ongoing ecological catastrophe, as the spending habits of the very wealthiest tend to be concentrated in carbon-intensive activities, and it limits opportunities to access the most meaningful work and the best health and educational resources to the richest few (Gilens 2012; Piketty 2014; 2020; Salverda, Nolan and Smeeding 2009; Wilkinson and Pickett 2011; 2018).

Do things have to be this way? And how, if at all, might life in countries like the UK be organised differently?

1.1 The orienting function of recent political philosophy

Despite a popular perception that philosophy is mostly useless hair-splitting, of little practical value, recent decades have seen a growing number of political philosophers and theorists offering compelling answers to these questions. Inspired by the somewhat ambiguous rejection of existing forms of “welfare-state capitalism” offered by John Rawls in his *A Theory of Justice* (1999a), there is now a large normative literature which offers sophisticated critiques of the injustices inherent in severely economically unequal societies and proposes radical alternative institutional structures.¹

Some theorists, for example, have defended elements of what might be termed a *turbo-charged social democracy*. In Jeppe von Platz’s recent articulation, a revitalized social democracy would be a system with both a comprehensive “sufficientarian floor” with universal basic income and expansive social services for all, and a firm “limitarian ceiling”, with a maximum wage and steep taxes on the wealthiest (von Platz 2020, 27). von Platz envisions his social democratic state securing full employment, extensive workplace protections, and strict curbs on

¹ A more comprehensive statement of the radicalism of Rawls’s institutional vision is found in “Part IV: Institutions of a Just Basic Structure” of his *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (Rawls 2001, 135-179).

the political influence of the wealthiest via the state funding of political parties, elections, and news media. With these institutional changes in place, von Platz claims, paid labour would tend to be a meaningful - rather than monotonous and exploitative - experience and the ideal of equal opportunity could be much more closely approximated than under existing forms of welfare-state capitalism (cf. Chandler 2023; Kenworthy 2019; Robeyns 2017; Vallier 2015; von Platz 2022).²

In a somewhat different vein, Alan Thomas and others have recently proposed a *property-owning democracy*, in which the state works to ensure roughly equal private ownership of capital among its citizens.³ Visions of property-owning democracy share a largely similar institutional architecture to the above form of social democracy but aim to go further in one crucial respect: they also seek to radically reduce the stark divide between the owner class and the (mostly) propertyless masses that is intrinsic to capitalism. Thomas envisions a largescale dispersal of capital-holdings amongst every citizen occurring “either indirectly through a society-wide unit trust scheme or via the individual holding of equity” (Thomas 2017, 359). The “society-wide unit trust”

² I use the epithet “turbo-charged” to distinguish this particular form of social democracy from the - clearly very different - economic vision which so-called “Third Way” actors and intellectuals describe as social democratic and which is arguably much more suspect, from an egalitarian perspective. See also Perry Anderson’s (2021) discussion of the term and what he calls its “dire connotations [...] in the lands of Blair and González, Hollande and Schröder.”

³ Throughout this thesis, I use the term “citizen” in a strictly descriptive - rather than legal - sense, to refer to *anyone that resides, or dwells, within the borders of a nation state*. My use of the term is thus intended to include both many (so-called) “aliens” and those granted legal citizenship rights by the state.

proposal in particular involves the government investing capital in large firms on behalf of each citizen, who are then all paid a share of the profits as a yearly dividend (cf. O'Neill and Williamson 2012; Thomas 2022; White 2003, chapter 8).

Other contemporary political philosophers defend a model of socialist public ownership, albeit one which makes far more room than was traditionally envisioned by socialists for market-based exchange and coordination. These forms of *liberal market socialism* share with property-owning democracy a desire to reduce the stark divide between an owner class and the (mostly) propertyless masses but go a step further still by seeking to constitutionally entrench public ownership of the commanding heights of the economy. William Edmundson (2017; 2021) and David Schweickart (2011), for example, have defended systems in which the firms which make up these commanding heights – such as banks, financial institutions, the healthcare system, natural monopolies in energy and transport, and many of the biggest tech monopolies - are democratically controlled by their workers and either directly owned by them or leased to them by the state (cf. Arnold 2022; Gilabert and O'Neill 2019, section 4; Ingram, 2018, chapter 4; Roemer 2017; 2019, chapters 13 & 14).

Turbo-charged social democracy, property-owning democracy and liberal market socialism⁴ have been defended from a wide range of

⁴ Whilst this tripartite distinction can be a useful way of dividing up recent contributions to the normative literature on alternatives to the economic status quo, we should, as Stuart White has noted, “be wary of setting up too stark an opposition between” these different schemes

different egalitarian viewpoints, including left libertarian, social or relational egalitarian, luck egalitarian, Rawlsian, the human capabilities approach, Marxist and Marxisant, civic republican and deliberative democratic.⁵ As a result of this broad range of underlying commitments, there are, of course, many points of contention within this now flourishing philosophical debate about the economic institutions required to secure social justice. Different egalitarian perspectives, in other words, offer competing views on the comparative desirability of these different institutional schemes as solutions to rising economic inequality.

To give just a brief snapshot of these debates: Alan Thomas (2017, 262) has claimed that there is something problematically

(White 2015a, 419). Rawls himself, for instance, notes that there are “many intermediate forms” between fully private-property and fully socialist economic systems (Rawls 1999a, 242). I thus use the terms throughout this thesis more as a kind of shorthand to refer to the various ideal types envisioned in recent work, rather than to claim that the three systems should always be conceived of as wholly distinct or competing.

⁵ For a very useful overview of many of these different egalitarian standpoints, see Gosepath (2021). Of course, many of the proposed policy changes that together constitute the alternate institutional schemes represented by turbo-charged social democracy, property-owning democracy, and liberal socialism, have also been defended from less explicitly normative premises by public policy experts and economists. Consider, for instance, James Meade’s idea of a “citizen’s trust” as an alternative to wholesale nationalisation and top-down economic planning (Meade 1993, 157; O’Neill and White 2019), Anthony Atkinson’s discussion of guaranteed public employment (Atkinson 2015, 140-146), Robin Blackburn’s proposal for democratically managed “social funds” funded through a levy on corporate profits (Blackburn 2002; 2006) and Thomas Piketty’s proposal for a universal capital endowment (Piketty 2020, 979-981). For a fascinating discussion of the normative premises implicit in Piketty’s empirical work in particular, and their overlap with Rawlsian thinking, see O’Neill (2017, 354-359).

inegalitarian and paternalistic about the state mandating worker ownership and workplace democracy, and that this counts in favour of the overall superiority of property-owning democracy as compared to liberal market socialism. Figures like Paul Raekstad (2022), Nicholas Vrousalis (2018) and Erik Olin Wright (2015a), by contrast, retort that in fact the compromise position sought by property-owning (and social) democrats is likely to be highly socially unstable, or provide insufficient protection against workplace domination, in a way that ought to cause egalitarians to reject it. Additionally, some critics (Cohen 2009; Maguire forthcoming) have also plausibly claimed that even the most radical of these schemes still do not go far enough, by arguing that there is something undesirably alienating and unjust about being forced to participate in market processes, even in a market socialist regime.⁶

Despite these ongoing debates, however, something shared by almost all recent work in this area is a commitment to helping to order widely shared moral intuitions about growing economic inequality, and to zoom in on the broad contours of the kinds of radical alternative institutional arrangements that would better reflect and uphold these values. All proponents of these schemes share the view that, in the words of Martin O'Neill and Joe Guinan, an “egalitarian and democratic

⁶ This last claim in particular is one to which I am very sympathetic. But - to the best of my knowledge - no left-critics of market socialism or property-owning democracy would object to something like one of these regimes as a *stepping-stone toward* an even more egalitarian institutional arrangement further in the future. Despite G.A. Cohen's reservations about any kind of market socialism, for instance, he still described it as “an eminently worthwhile project, from a socialist point of view” (Cohen 2009, 74).

society cannot be achieved through piecemeal redistribution within the outdated and inadequate economic institutions that we already have but will require *an ambitious reimaging of the institutional architecture of the economy*" (Guinan and O'Neill 2020, 38).

Of course, depending on the precise set of moral principles that one happens to find most persuasive when it comes to matters of economic justice, one's reasons for supporting one or all of these alternative institutional schemes are likely to differ: it might be because they seem likely to secure a less *exploitative* society, a society with less *domination*, less *oppression*, less *alienation*, less relations of *social superiority and inferiority*, or a society with more equal *political voice* for all, or more *flourishing*. But with the aid of this work, it becomes relatively easy to at least see how there is nothing natural or inevitable about the vast economic hierarchies which some tell us to simply accept as a fact of life: there are alternative, morally desirable institutional schemes available under which the lives of citizens like Abby and Ricky could plausibly be vastly improved, whichever specific egalitarian metric or set of metrics one wishes to use to measure improvement.

In other words, these increasingly sophisticated normative discussions deliver a very useful degree of *political orientation*. They provide a compelling picture of what a radically more just economic settlement in certain countries could plausibly look like. What these utopian visions thus help us to do is to "take our bearings" in the "topsy-turvy world" of politics - to use Hannah Arendt's (1994, 323; 314) phrases - by partially clearing the fog of confusion that surrounds

questions of economic inequality and affirming our hope in the prospects for a radically fairer society.

This undoubtedly constitutes a real theoretical advance for political philosophy. For many decades since John Rawls published his *Theory of Justice*, normative debates seem to have been largely dominated by abstract discussions about various aspects of this ground-breaking book's theoretical architecture, such as the idea of the original position and the lexical priority of the Liberty Principle. Consequently, Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers could complain in 1995 that a lack of "attention has been devoted to examining the political institutions and social arrangements that might plausibly implement" egalitarian principles of justice (Cohen and Rogers 1995, 10; 239). Thankfully, it is largely no longer possible to share Cohen and Rogers's complaint. The now flourishing debate on institutional alternatives to contemporary inegalitarian capitalism is evidence of a philosophical discipline attuned not only to the most abstract questions (which obviously remain important in their own right), but also to matters of concrete institutional realisation.

1.2 Limits to political orientation in the existing literature

Whilst undeniably valuable, the degree of orientation offered by this existing work on social democracy, property-owning democracy and liberal market socialism is currently highly circumscribed in one crucial respect. Rather than aims which can be realized immediately under

present political conditions, all these proposals clearly constitute long- or at least medium-term political goals. They call for the fundamental transformation of many existing political and economic institutions, and the passing into law of many novel and contentious public policies. The currently very low political profile among the *demos* of these institutional alternatives to contemporary neoliberal capitalism must also be raised significantly. And some of the understandings and beliefs currently shared by a significant number of citizens - on issues like the appropriate reach of government and the legitimate entitlements of citizenship - must also be substantially altered. In short, instituting reforms of the kind favoured by many contemporary political philosophers clearly requires *radical social change*.⁷

What is currently missing from the now voluminous normative literature on alternatives to the political and economic status quo, in other words, is an adequate theory of political transition: an account which specifies the forms of political action that might play a desirable role, under present political conditions, in making the realization of these radical social changes a more realistic future prospect.

Confronted with the current scale of economic inequality, we want to know not only why contemporary capitalism might be undesirable, or how things might be better under some alternative scheme, but also

⁷For the definition of social change as “the significant alteration of social structure and cultural patterns,” see Harper and Leicht (2019, 5; cf. Zheng 2022). See also Fung (2020), who distinguishes between social change taking place at the level of (i) quotidian social interaction, (ii) public policy, (iii) social structures and institutions, and (iv) ideology and culture.

what ought to be done about this from where we are now.

How might opponents of rising economic inequality begin to realize these large-scale social changes from where they are now? Which forms of political action ought to be undertaken under present political conditions to increase the likelihood of long-term egalitarian goals eventually being implemented, and persisting over time? When it comes to these questions, unfortunately, the orienting function of contemporary political philosophy appears - mostly - to break down.

It has become increasingly common for political theorists to point to the existence of this blind spot regarding transitional questions in the literature on alternatives to the economic status quo. For Lea Ypi, for example, “how to theorize the political transition to a condition of ideal justice [...] is a topic on which mainstream political theory is surprisingly silent” (Ypi 2018). Michael Goodhart has also recently claimed that whilst contemporary political theory contains many “prescriptions for social change, it pays very little attention to how that change might come about”, mostly ignoring questions of agency, strategy, and tactics (Goodhart 2018, 177). And for Miriam Ronzoni, similarly, the emphasis of political theorizing “should be more on political action and political processes than on which cure to put forward once the political power to put forward a cure at all has been achieved” (Ronzoni 2018, 124).⁸

⁸ There are many other examples we could also cite: Katrina Forrester bemoans how “after Rawls’s theory [...] became a new baseline” older debates - such as those about the nature and value of collective action and political strategy - were mostly “set aside or taken out of

Alongside the construction of utopian pictures of the future, these scholars claim, political theorists should also be working to identify the concrete means by which the actually existing world can be moved towards and transformed into, this more just economic future. As the above list of quotes should make clear, many scholars are now articulating their frustration with this gap in the orientating power of contemporary normative theorizing. But there has been very little attempt to actually reduce the gap itself. With a few honourable exceptions (Deveaux 2018; Laurence 2020; Zheng 2022), it is striking how few political theorists have expended intellectual energy attempting to answer a question that so many scholars have pointed to as being in desperate need of tackling. The aim of *Justice & Class Consciousness* is to begin to reduce this gap, by providing the first

philosophical discourse altogether" (Forrester 2019, xix). And for Stuart White, "egalitarians need more discussion not just of policy but of politics" (White 2015b). Martin O'Neill has also recently claimed that egalitarian theorists need to think far more about "the conditions for political agency that could deliver us" to a more egalitarian future "from where we are now" (O'Neill 2017, 370). Similarly, Pablo Gilabert describes the lack of discussions of the forms of action "that lead agents from where they are to a social situation in which" social justice has been secured as "a gaping hole in political philosophy" (Gilabert 2017, 110). And Michael Schwartz has also written that political theorists have mostly failed to "offer a plausible analysis of how to get from the 'here' (of radically unequal power among interests and groups) to the 'there' of an egalitarian democratic society" (Schwartz 2009, 13). This is also a common critique of analytic normative theorizing by scholars more inspired by the tradition of critical theory and by those attracted to the so-called realist revolt against "moralism" in political theory. For example, Nancy Fraser has claimed that mainstream political theorists identify "moral fault lines" but generally fail "to map social and political fault lines" (Fraser and Jaeggi 2018, 123). And Raymond Geuss - in characteristically provocative fashion - has also claimed that the absence of a theory of implementation in Rawlsian political thought is "the epidermal sign of a lethal tumour" (Geuss 2008, 94).

systematic theory of political transition towards a radically more economically just society.⁹

1.3 What would it mean to provide a theory of transition?

A philosophical theory of political transition specifies, as Robin Zheng has put it, “*the right way to bring about a just society*” from where we are now (Zheng 2022, 2; cf. Dunn 1990, 193; Robeyns 2008, 347; Stears 2005, 347). This much seems clear. But there is surprisingly little theoretical work on what the best way to build a sophisticated account of the right actions to move us closer to a just society actually is. Whilst philosophers clearly disagree wildly when it comes to what exactly social justice, say, or state legitimacy looks like, there are at least several very well-established and fairly widely shared ways to build theories of justice and legitimacy.¹⁰ But when it comes to the small

⁹ Questions of the transition to racially just and gender just and globally just worlds have been similarly neglected. Constructing one complete meta-theory for achieving justice *in toto* strikes me as far too ambitious an undertaking, so whilst I hope to stay acutely attuned to the various ways in which racial and gender injustices intersect with economic ones, I will focus almost entirely on the problem of *economic* transition in what follows. But I am certainly not committed to the claim that questions of national economic justice are somehow the only important ones (the idea that all instances of racial abuse delivered to people of colour, all instances of rape and sexual assault, or all instances of racial and gender discrimination in healthcare and education would simply disappear if one of these egalitarian economic schemes was instituted is clearly ludicrous). Rather, my hope is that aspects of my general approach can be useful in constructing these other, much-needed transitional theories.

¹⁰ We might think, for instance, of the widely observed methodological distinction between questions of “patterns” of justice (like prioritarian

amount of philosophical work that has been done on questions of transition, things seem like much more of an intellectual free-for-all, with each author simply picking their own intuitive model for theory-construction without offering much justification. The best demonstration, of course, of the value of any given approach, is a compelling overall theory. But before introducing the main contours of my own substantive theory, I want to say at least something about what I take to be the major components, and major kinds, of transitional theorising.

In my view, there are three crucial components of any theory which seeks to describe how to move closer to (and away from) some state of affairs: the mapping of *feasibility constraints*, the description of *feasibility-enhancing outcomes*, and the defence of specific *transitionally valuable actions*. More specifically, I think a transitional theory must outline:

(1) a significant feasibility constraint on the achievement of the ultimate transitional goal (or set of such constraints).

(2) a feasibility-enhancing outcome that would significantly increase the chances of achieving the ultimate transitional goal by lessening (or

or sufficientarian), “currencies” of justice (like opportunities or resources) and the “site” of justice (the nation state, the globe) (Hickey et al 2021, 1-2). These background methodological distinctions provide a kind of common language in which debates about ideal justice can take place, a common language that is currently missing from what little work exists on questions of transition.

removing entirely) the constraint specified in (1) if it were to come to pass.

and (3) the specific transitionally valuable actions that could effectively and permissibly realise the feasibility-enhancing outcome specified in (2).

I will save a fuller account of the concept of feasibility for chapter three. But let me briefly illustrate. Let's say that I want to achieve the outcome of cooking a three-course meal for my family this coming weekend. If I am thinking about how exactly to transition to a world in which this has been accomplished, the first thing we need to identify is, I would argue, the most significant constraints on the feasibility of my achieving this outcome. In this instance, I might identify the primary constraint as being a skill-based one: I currently lack the knowledge and practical expertise required to successfully cook such a meal.

Having now identified a major constraint on the achievement of my ultimate transitional goal, I think we then need to identify an outcome which would increase the chances of achieving the ultimate transitional goal by lessening (or removing entirely) this constraint. In this instance, I might identify this outcome as: having someone else with the skills I lack to take the lead in the kitchen, allocating simple tasks to me and improving my skills as we prepare the meal together.

Finally, having completed the first two steps, we need to specify the concrete means or actions that could both *effectively* and *permissibly*

realise this feasibility-enhancing outcome. In this instance, I might identify the relevant action being that of politely asking a culinary enthusiast friend if they were willing to do this and offering to do some favour for them in return for their help. Notice that when it comes to transitional theorising, it is generally not enough to just identify a concrete action that *effectively* realises this feasibility-enhancing outcome: there are myriad ways in which I could potentially successfully bring my desired feasibility-enhancing outcome about, including kidnapping the head chef from a local restaurant and forcing them to cook for me. But such an action would usually be regarded as impermissible, and so should be ruled out, despite it representing one potential way to effectively reach my goal. This is something helpfully captured in Zheng's description of transitional theorising, cited above: we want to know not only what paths *could* be taken to bring about some future state of affairs, but also what the *right* way is.¹¹

Essentially, by working through these three theoretical stages, I can gain a fairly comprehensive picture of what is required to successfully transition to the state of affairs I desire. Of course, few political outcomes, especially those concerning processes of radical social change, will be as simplistic and easily identifiable as this dinner-based example. But the basic theoretical process is still, I think, broadly the same, even if the causal processes are usually a lot less

¹¹ Rawls also describes non-ideal theory as involving identifying "courses of action that are morally permissible [...] *as well as likely to be effective.*" (Rawls 1999b, 89, emphasis added). See also the discussion of permissibility in Hendrix (2019, 16-17).

straightforward and it is usually *collective* rather than individual agents that are involved.

Those then, in my view, are the three major components of any compelling theory of transition. We need to know what one or several of the major relevant *feasibility constraints* are, what outcomes would be *feasibility-enhancing* by lessening or removing this constraint or these constraints, and what specific courses of action possess the requisite *transitional value* by both effectively and permissibly realising this feasibility-enhancing outcome.

I also think there are two broad *types* of transitional theories which it is important to distinguish between, each of which incorporates the above three components: *exhaustive* theories of transition on the one hand, and *embryonic* ones on the other. An exhaustive theory of political transition for a radically more equal economic settlement would precisely specify how we ought to move from - for instance - the UK in 2022, to a specific form of, say, liberal market socialism. It would provide an exacting account of all the major constraints on the achievement of this goal, and a *complete transitional trajectory* for overcoming them: what bills or laws it would be necessary to pass (and in what order), how they could come to be passed, as well as how successfully carrying out these various courses of actions could respect what it is that we morally owe to others. Because of the internal diversity among even the wealthiest capitalist countries, and the constant flux and change that seems integral to the political realm, it would have to be a highly *contextual* theory, with its proposals of

various concrete means being precisely “GPS-, date- and time-stamped”, as Bernard Harcourt has put it (Harcourt 2020, 413).

Embryonic theories of political transition, by contrast, seek to complete the necessary *groundwork* that can enable a more exhaustive theory. The account they offer aims to apply not only to one highly specific context, but more broadly across a range of locations and times, with the more general insights offered then being used as the basis for filling out a more narrowly contextual and complete theory at a later date.¹² An embryonic theory tries to specify, in other words, one or several of *the most important elements* of a more exhaustive answer to the question of how we might begin to move from say, a country broadly like the UK in the 2020s, to something like a turbo-charged social democracy, property-owning democracy or liberal market socialist state, specifying one or several important constraints, and several important concrete means for effectively and permissibly achieving outcomes which could overcome them.

An obvious downside to limiting one’s theoretical ambition to the provision of an embryonic theory of transition is that the orientation it can offer is far less comprehensive than what would be provided by an exhaustive theory of transition. But there are several reasons why I nonetheless favour pursuing this approach in what

¹² This is something that is arguably not as well-captured in the various possible synonyms for embryonic, like “undeveloped”, “incomplete” or “rudimentary”. In my view, it is “embryonic” that best captures the way in which this kind of theory can *grow into* a more comprehensive one at a later stage (embryo derives from the Greek *bruein*, meaning “to swell or grow” (Hoad 1996, 146)).

follows. First and foremost, providing the theoretical groundwork for a more exhaustive account is a logically prior task: it is what is required to provide the more exhaustive theory at a later date, and it seems obvious to me that sufficient groundwork has yet to be accomplished, meaning this task cannot simply be skipped.

Relatedly, it is clearly this groundwork task that lends itself most naturally to the tools of political philosophy. As Tommie Shelby notes, for instance, “theory can only do so much to illuminate” many of the “difficult and complex questions of political practice” (Shelby 2007, 159). As we fill in more and more empirical detail and become more and more contextual, the task arguably becomes considerably less theoretical and much more social scientific and empirical. But - to borrow a famous phrase from Wilfrid Sellars - what abstract theorising certainly can achieve is a sense of how things like *a just economy* and *transitional political action* “hang together” in broad terms. It can provide, to parrot Sellars again, the conceptual and evaluative tools necessary to broadly “know one’s way around” a given practical problem, tools which others can then deploy in their more specialised intellectual endeavours (Sellars 2007 [1962], 369).

Furthermore, embryonic accounts are also arguably much more sensitive to the extent of the epistemic limits that confront us in our attempts to construct a theory of transition. Given what appears to be the vast distance between the status quo and even the most moderate of the institutional schemes favoured by contemporary egalitarian theorists, it is very likely that present political conditions simply do not

provide an appropriate vantage point from which to sketch an even halfway complete picture of egalitarian political transition. It is likely impossible to predict how circumstances will change as we set down the road of transition, and how these changes then require further alterations to the theory.

Committing to providing an exhaustive theory would also require choosing which institutional scheme the transitional theorist believes should represent the ultimate horizon of egalitarian economic change. But as well as it being very difficult, perhaps impossible, to see exactly how to reach a radically more equal future from where we are now, epistemic limits arguably also apply to our ability to know exactly which institutional scheme would in fact be best in this future world.

Clarifying - but very abstract - thought experiments about which kind of economic settlement rational individuals would consent to behind a veil of ignorance are obviously no guarantee of the specific set of institutional arrangements that could most securely gain democratic assent in the future, or which scheme would be able to reproduce itself most stably over time.¹³ It therefore perhaps makes further sense, at least from our current position, to not discriminate too much between

¹³ As Hendrix has put it, “it is hard for anyone under any conditions to tell what kinds of institutional configurations will be tolerably effective at protecting individuals until they actually come about” (Hendrix 2019, 244). One of the most attractive features of the work of the late Erik Olin Wright (2019) was his sensitivity to these epistemic limits. This is evident, for instance, in his argument that the precise institutional configuration of a future socialist state, rather than being something that we can simply build from scratch based on preconceived and complete plans, would be the result of experimentation over time. See also Honneth (2017).

the radically egalitarian schemes favoured by recent political philosophers, and to talk instead in general terms, where possible, about reaching any one of them.¹⁴

To be clear, despite its ambitions to speak more broadly and generally than an exhaustive theory, an embryonic transitional theory is certainly not so broad that its insights possess anything like universal relevance: the theory is still what we might term *geographically circumscribed* and *morally circumscribed* in various ways. In terms of geography, for instance, my main point of reference, as already mentioned, is the question of political transition within what are often called the advanced capitalist democracies. I certainly do not claim that the arguments I make below will translate easily, or even at all, to those who live in very different countries, with very different political and economic make ups. Claiming anything like universal geographic relevance strikes me as problematically paternalistic, given my intellectual and social embeddedness in the politics and circumstances

¹⁴ Further in the future, when the realization of one or all these schemes is hopefully closer to hand, it will obviously become necessary to “pick a side”, so to speak, as we will confront multiple political forks in the road. For example, Wright (2015a) argues against the implementation of a basic capital grant and in favour of a basic income on the grounds that it represents a more favourable route to his ultimate goal of the abolition of capitalism. But serious moments of decision where the changes required for (e.g.) liberal socialism cease to be coextensive with the changes required for (e.g.) property-owning democracy appear to be some way off, given that the prospects for implementing *either* of these policies from where we are now are currently rather small. I discuss the various points of overlap between these three egalitarian institutional schemes in more detail in chapter three (particularly section two).

of the advanced capitalist democracies of Europe and North America.¹⁵

And in terms of morality, many right-libertarians, conservatives, and classical liberals, because of their foundational normative commitments, will of course not find the theory of transition that I aim to provide even remotely compelling. Most proponents of these views are unmoved by even very stark inequalities or think that implementing proposed egalitarian institutional alternatives would result in costs to - for instance - private property rights, economic efficiency, individual liberty, or social stability, that are too high to bear. It is clearly only if one subscribes to certain, very different, moral presuppositions to these that the question underlying my embryonic theory of transition - if radically reducing economic inequality is both desirable and possible, how ought we to go about beginning to achieve it from where we are now? - will make sense, and not everyone shares these views.¹⁶

¹⁵ To give just one example, informal employment (work not regulated or taxed by the state, such as that undertaken by many street vendors and agricultural workers) makes up an enormous share of total employment in most of the countries of Eastern, Western and Central Africa and Southern Asia (generally somewhere between 82-95%). This compares with figures of only around 10-13% in advanced capitalist democracies like Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Portugal, Switzerland and the UK, and a figure of 18% for the United States (see ILO 2018, 85-90). In my view, differences of this magnitude clearly necessitate very different economic (and political-strategic) remedies to injustice: would a transition to a radically egalitarian economic system in much of Africa and Asia only be possible *after* a process of incorporation of informal workers into the conventional capitalist wage-labour economy, or is it possible for such countries to "leapfrog" over this stage? I merely flag this question here and do not take a stance on it. My thanks to Mehmet Şahinler for discussion on this point.

¹⁶ For the classic statement that the primary difference between the political left and political right is attitudes towards inequality, see Bobbio (1996).

But we would never be able to get round to the actual embryonic transitional theorizing if we first endeavoured to comprehensively rebuff all the objections that holders of such liberal, libertarian and conservative views could raise. I thus leave the ground-level defence of the egalitarian normative position, and the desirability of the institutional schemes it defends to others,¹⁷ and assume throughout an audience of readers broadly motivated to reduce rising economic inequality through radical egalitarian social change of one kind or another.

This is the broad “we” that I have already referred to multiple times: that diverse group of citizens, activists, philosophers, and other intellectuals committed in one way or another to seeing a radically more equal economy come about. Whilst this obviously limits the potential readership for this project to some extent, it should still appeal to a broad range of intellectual opinion, ranging from the “moderate” left-liberalism of figures such as Paul Krugman and Joseph Stiglitz (which in truth still calls for a fundamental transformation of the capitalist status quo), to the even more transformative positions recently defended by Thomas Piketty (2020), and up to and including recent intellectual proponents of “millennial socialism” such as Jacobin editor Bhaskar Sunkara (see Shelley 2020). Even those who have no settled convictions about the shape of a more just future, but simply wish to halt the drift towards further inequality, can probably benefit

¹⁷ For illuminating critiques of anti-egalitarian positions in political philosophy, see: Arnold (2013) and Freeman (2001).

from the provision of a theory of transition of this sort.

1.4 A summary of the argument

So, what specific answer does my embryonic theory of transition towards something like a turbo-charged social democracy, property-owning democracy or liberal socialist regime defend? What actions should we (egalitarian political theorists and egalitarian political activists such as self-proclaimed socialists, radical liberals, and social democrats) undertake in the here-and-now to transform social reality, as it currently stands, in the direction of these visions of economic justice? Following the three-stage process I outlined above for specifying a transitional theory (first undertaking the mapping of *feasibility constraints*, followed by the description of *feasibility-enhancing outcomes*, and culminating in the defence of specific *transitionally valuable actions*), the basic argument I seek to defend in the thesis is as follows:

(1) one of the most important feasibility constraints on realising a radically more just economic system is the current political and economic power possessed by the capitalist class.

(2) raising a particular kind of class consciousness - what I call transformative egalitarian class consciousness - among what I term the "egalitarian constituency", is an outcome which would enhance the

feasibility of achieving the ultimate transitional goal by lessening the constraint posed by the capitalist class.

and (3) the concrete means or actions required to effectively and permissibly achieve (2) are (a) mass political education initiatives taking place through what I call *pedagogically orientated class struggle organisations*, and (b) various forms of disruptive and persuasive activist practices to engender the necessary intent to participate in these pedagogic initiatives in the first place (such as organising conversations, left populist discourse, and democratic municipalist activity).

Taken together, these arguments constitute, I think, an important embryonic theory of egalitarian political transition. “Raising class consciousness” is clearly no panacea, and much more philosophical work remains to be done on this unjustly neglected set of strategic and tactical political questions. But I hope to demonstrate in what follows both why raising a particular kind of class consciousness can be a desirable and important component of a strategy of struggle for achieving economic justice *and* highlight the specific kinds of activities that can contribute to effectively and permissibly delivering this consciousness. In my view, this provides what I take to be one especially important component of a more exhaustive answer to the question of how to realise the schemes favoured by property-owning democrats, liberal socialists, radical social democrats and others, from

where we are now.

The overall answer to the question of transition I seek to defend can also be put in more deontological terms. It is often stated that we ought to discharge natural “duties of justice.” These duties are the limited obligations all individuals have to one another to rectify social injustice and “assist in the establishment of just arrangements” (Rawls 1999a, 294).¹⁸ Judgements about which given course of action best discharges natural duties of justice must be sensitive to both (a) the resources at the duty-bearer’s disposal and (b) the differing “justice impacts” that the different practices under consideration might have in different circumstances (Shelby 2007, 155). It is thus notoriously difficult to derive a broad and generic answer to a precise duty-judgement of this kind, but the kinds of actions which are nonetheless usually thought to discharge the natural duty of justice in circumstances like ours include “voting for, and financing, the ‘correct’ party, [...] offering financial support to activist groups [...] going on strike when appropriate [...] engaging in civil disobedience” (Valentini 2021, 62 fn 12) and sometimes even uncivil and covert forms of disobedience such as whistleblowing (Delmas 2018, chapter 3).

¹⁸ Under conditions of great injustice, these duties are weighty, but still nonetheless limited because, as Hendrix describes it, “even when great injustice continues to exist in the world, one is entitled to the chance to live a meaningful life” rather than it being morally mandatory for all individuals to “behave purely as an instrument for the pursuit of justice” (Hendrix 2019, 173). G.A. Cohen also discusses what he calls “a legitimate personal prerogative” which “grants each person the right to be something other than an engine for the welfare of other people” (2008, 10).

A more deontological or “agent-implicating”¹⁹ way to put the argument of this thesis is thus that part of what “we” ought to do to discharge our natural duties of justice (where “we” refers to those among the advanced capitalist democracies who already believe that something like a turbo-charged social democracy, property-owning democracy, or liberal market socialism would represent an improvement on the economic status quo) is: to build and participate in pedagogically orientated class struggle organisations, and to engage in organising conversations and democratic municipalist practice in order to generate the various preconditions for the spread of transformative egalitarian class consciousness among other, less committed (or completely disengaged) fellow members of the egalitarian constituency. I take this to be a useful expansion on the usual set of practices thought to be ways to discharge these natural duties.²⁰

To defend this broad thesis, the chapters that follow gradually

¹⁹ Humberstone draws a useful distinction between what he calls “agent-implicating” and “situational” moral claims (Humberstone 1971, 8). The latter is a broad evaluative claim that judges it good or desirable that *y* event or situation (like the raising of class consciousness) occurs, *without* making a claim about individual moral requirements. Whereas the former is a narrower evaluative predicate that makes a direct claim about moral responsibility of the form that “it is wrong [or right] of” *x* specific agent to themselves play a part in bringing about some outcome (like the raising of class consciousness) (Humberstone 1971, 9; cf. List and Valentini 2020, 186). I am claiming that the central normative argument of the thesis can be understood in both agent-implicating and situational terms.

²⁰ A *particularly* strong case can perhaps be made that egalitarian-minded academics, given their extensive existing knowledge of the relevant empirical and normative literatures, will often be in a position where leading activist-pedagogy of the kind described in chapter six is the best way for them to discharge their natural duties of justice.

progress through each of the three stages described above. I begin in the next chapter by performing some of the necessary conceptual groundwork to defend my overall claim. I describe both the broad *concepts* and the specific *conceptions* of class and class consciousness that I will be deploying throughout the thesis. Roughly, I define a class as *a group of individuals that share positions within a social structure*. I then claim that, despite widespread concerns about economic class being an outdated term, it is still possible to identify a capitalist, middle and working class in the advanced capitalist democracies based on the amounts of economic power different individuals within the social structure of production possess.

I then define economic class consciousness as a complex of robustly action-guiding beliefs and desires about these power hierarchies in economic production. Finally, I distinguish my own favoured conception of class consciousness - what I call transformative egalitarian class consciousness - from other available conceptions based on the specific beliefs and desires that together constitute the complex. Central to transformative egalitarian class consciousness, I claim, is: a *class belonging* belief, a *class inequality* belief, a *curtailing inequality* desire and a *collective working class action* belief.

Chapter three then fills out the first two stages of my transitional theory, identifying both (1) a significant feasibility constraint on the achievement of egalitarian economic justice (the capitalist class) and (2) a feasibility-enhancing outcome that would significantly increase the chances of achieving the ultimate transitional goal by lessening this

constraint (raising transformative egalitarian class consciousness, or, for ease of exposition, ^(TE) class consciousness). It begins with a broad account of the feasibility of instituting a turbo-charged social democracy, property-owning democracy, or liberal market socialist regime under present political circumstances. The chapter then draws on both historical and contemporary empirical evidence to claim that members of the capitalist class are very likely to resist this institutionalisation and thus represent a significant “soft constraint” on the achievement of egalitarian economic justice.

I then move on to argue that raising ^(TE) class consciousness is an outcome which would enhance the feasibility of achieving the ultimate transitional goal by lessening the constraint posed by the capitalist class. I claim that if members of the “egalitarian constituency” (existing supporters of egalitarian economic change and many others who can plausibly come to be supportive) were armed with this type of consciousness, they would be far more capable of emerging victorious in the class struggle against the beneficiaries of economic injustice that inevitably must be waged if egalitarian economic transformations are to be sustainably implemented. Chapter three also features an extended discussion of the idea of “class reductionism” and demonstrates how the arguments I make in the thesis can make class central without lapsing into reductive claims.

The rest of the thesis then explores several concrete forms of political action that, I claim, can effectively and permissibly contribute to the raising of transformative egalitarian class consciousness and

which together fit together into a three-stage model of consciousness-raising. In chapter four, I examine two sets of thought patterns that I think are habitually deployed by many members of the egalitarian constituency in the advanced capitalist democracies and that I claim work to create a hostile environment for class consciousness-raising. The two frames often possessed by members of the egalitarian constituency that I claim must be disrupted by consciousness-raisers under present political circumstances are what I call *divergent status* frames on the one hand (which distribute some members of a community into a social grouping of inferior or lesser status to “regular” members of the community), and *privatistic* frames on the other (which promote general indifference or even antipathy towards broad questions of social organisation and civic participation). I claim that when individuals are in the thrall of divergent status or privatistic frames, they are highly unlikely to be receptive to attempts to inculcate a class-conscious frame.

Chapter four also highlights two specific forms of political practice through which these frames might be effectively and permissibly disrupted. The first practice I highlight is left populism, understood as a rhetorical strategy of drawing attention to the existence of two antagonistic camps within the citizenry as a means of advancing the traditional ideological values of the left. The second practice I highlight is democratic municipalism, defined as democratic associations of local residents that both build and empower neighbourhood assemblies and make improvements to the municipal provision of basic goods and

services. I argue that by disrupting divergent status frames and privatistic frames respectively, left populist discourse and democratic municipalist action can work to create a more favourable background environment against which the more involved stages of consciousness-raising can later take place.

Chapter five focuses on the second stage of my three-part model of consciousness-raising: the generation of what I call *participatory intent*, and the transitionally valuable role that organising conversations can play in creating and maintaining it. Organising conversations are structured, one-on-one discussions in which activists aim to isolate a citizen's grievances, and then share relevant information to persuade them that engaging in political participation of some kind is the best way to alleviate their complaints. After describing what this practice involves, I compare it to several adjacent, but usually distinct forms of verbal political communication: traditional neighbourhood canvassing on the one hand (a practice which takes place when political activists arrive unannounced on strangers' doorsteps during door-to-door neighbourhood walks) and everyday political talk on the other (the kinds of quotidian political discussion which takes place in the home and elsewhere).

I then make a case for organising conversations being a central means for effectively generating participatory intent: I draw on evidence which demonstrates that structured interpersonal political conversations are capable of resulting in a relatively long-lasting persuasion effect and highlight several conditions which - if present -

can maximize the prospects for the generation of participatory intent taking place. I conclude by examining how activists conducting these conversations can avoid what I call various “impermissibility risks”, by refraining from implanting false or misleading beliefs in their interlocutors.

The final substantive chapter, chapter six, claims that it is participation of members of the egalitarian constituency in what I call *pedagogically oriented class struggle organisations* that is best suited to effectively and permissibly generating the belief-desire complex central to ^(TE) class consciousness. The paradigmatic examples of class struggle organisations that I refer to throughout the chapter are political parties, trade unions, and social movements that aim to realize egalitarian transformations of the class structure. The chapter highlights two main reasons why such organisations are well suited to generating the transitionally valuable kind of class consciousness. On the one hand, under certain conditions, experiences of participating in class struggle organisations will often involve the kind of *informal education* that can generate and strengthen the belief-desire complex central to ^(TE) class consciousness. On the other, if such organisations also make a concerted effort to engage in *formal education* of various sorts - providing information and concerted opportunities to learn it through discussion, writing and application - this can also play a role in generating ^(TE) class consciousness.

I then move on to deal with an important worry about the prospects for these organisations permissibly generating the right kind

of class consciousness under present political conditions. I claim that activist educators can permissibly inculcate class conscious beliefs provided they place an emphasis on the simultaneous inculcation of what I call *reflective capacity*. There is a further worry which concerns whether leaders of class struggle organisations can possess the requisite dispositions to ensure that this kind of class consciousness is in fact raised in an all-things-considered permissible way. But I claim that there are reasons to be sceptical that the delicate balancing of ends that desirable activist-led education requires is either categorically unachievable, or avoidable, in the way objectors might press.

As I note in the conclusion, my hope is that the arguments I develop across these chapters make two central intellectual contributions. First, and most importantly, the thesis hopefully helps to begin to fill the substantial blind spot that so many scholars are now identifying within contemporary egalitarian political thought. At the conceptual level, for instance, the hope is that these arguments can help to renovate and reintroduce neglected terms – the capitalist class, class struggle, class consciousness – which are now all-too rarely the subject of extended discussion among egalitarian political philosophers, but which, I think, provide some of the keys to unlocking the question of transition. Whilst liberal egalitarianism (broadly construed) may well provide the most normatively persuasive account of what a just economic settlement looks like, my hope is to persuasively show how ideas and notions from far outside of (and often even directly maligned by) this tradition remain vital if these utopian visions are ever to be

realized.

Second, there is also a now-flourishing literature across the social sciences – both empirical and normative – on different activist practices, such as on political partisanship (White and Ypi 2016), uncivil disobedience (Delmas 2018) and strikes (Gourevitch 2018). Yet many of the activist practices discussed in this thesis – organising conversations, democratic municipalism, and activist-led education – currently remain highly underdiscussed, so the thesis can hopefully also make an important contribute to this emerging literature.

And in terms of the more empirically focused work on political activism (e.g., Choudry 2015; Schulman 2021), my relatively abstract theoretical remarks on different activist practices will clearly make no substantive empirical contribution of their own, and do not intend to. But, as Thomas Christiano notes, one thing that political philosophy can do is to “provide a map that gives us pointers as to what kinds of empirical research needs to be done” and this can often be an important contribution in its own right (Christiano 2008, 7). While the remarks collected here thus cannot provide anything like certainty concerning the effectiveness and desirability of concrete instances of (for instance) activist education or democratic municipalism, I hope they can do enough to convince some empirically minded scholars that looking at existing instances of (e.g.) activist-led education on the ground is an important future task, and also provide a sense of the elements of these practices that require particular empirical attention.

1.5 Is this project too partisan?

A recurrent worry when I presented work from this thesis at academic conferences or submitted extracts to journals, was that this project was in some important sense *too partisan* to count as “real” political philosophy. It is thus probably worthwhile to spend just a moment, before we commence in earnest, confronting this worry head-on. The main concern here seems to be that, by taking its opposition to the economic status quo and its preference for a radically more equal economic settlement more or less for granted, the theory I seek to develop necessarily suffers from a deficiency of the kind of striving for neutrality that is meant to characterise a “true” contribution to political philosophy. Daniel McDermott, for example, seems to express a version of this view when he writes that: “the political philosopher who sees himself as a man of the left or the right, and his challenge to be one of providing intellectual ammunition for his side, is *no different* from a creationist who sets out to get a Ph.D. in biology in order to better equip himself to defend the Bible against assaults from evolutionists” (McDermott 2008, 25, emphasis added; cf. van der Vossen 2015).

But - at the risk of again reducing the size of the potential audience for this project - I think it is important to be upfront and to state clearly that the vision of political philosophy that underlies this worry is one that I wholeheartedly reject. I am not of the view that the possession of a partisan political allegiance is incompatible with valuable political theorizing. One reason for this is that dealing with any

theoretical problem in sufficient depth necessarily requires leaving certain empirical and normative assumptions un-argued for. This is why work in climate ethics assumes the veracity of climate science or work on the shape of a just society often assumes the veracity of normative assumptions such as the fundamental equality of persons. We should start to worry if *all* or *most* political philosophy took my working assumptions (about there being features of the current economy that are unjust, and that a more just world of some kind is possible and desirable) for granted and refused to examine them. But this is, I would suggest, far from being the case. Because so much work already probes these assumptions, it seems philosophically acceptable to see what kinds of theoretical and political progress might be made by leaving them un-argued for in one piece of work.²¹

Relatedly, sometimes the proponent of the partisan worry seems to almost be suggesting that we should wait until the debate between

²¹ There is also the related worry that sometimes arises as to whether engaging with these transitional questions is simply to leave the realm of political philosophy entirely and to start to do something else. But this, of course, depends on one's conception of political philosophy. There is, admittedly, a long tradition of describing the field in narrow terms as primarily studying the question of legitimate and just government or state activity (e.g., Farrelly 2004, xi; Pettit 1996, 284; Plamenatz 1960, 37) and it does seem clear how on this account, questions of political transition begin to look incompatible with the field's frame of reference. But there is also a tradition of political theorising that, rather than narrowly focusing on government action, takes a much wider purview wherein political philosophy is about the question of legitimate and just social relations in total (Feinberg 1973, 1; cf. Christman 2018). It is this latter tradition (sometimes referred to as *social* philosophy rather than *political* philosophy, but which I think provides a more useful description of political philosophy's purview) which I take as my main source of inspiration in what follows.

egalitarian theories and more libertarian and conservative ones has been settled before we move on to questions that require taking egalitarian conclusions for granted. But again, this seems highly mistaken, in the same way it would be a mistake to not do anything about climate change until every sceptic and dissenter has been won round.²²

But perhaps most importantly, this worry is also usually insufficiently sensitive to the fact that there are *degrees* of partisanship. At one end of the scale lies the philosopher striving for a completely “neutral”, and commitment-free form of theorizing, and at the other lies the creationist advancing their cause with doctoral study, in blatant disregard of widely established scientific facts. It is between these two extremes that I think most interesting political theorizing happens. Here, philosophers typically hold what Nancy Fraser has described as “a partisan, though not uncritical identification” with a political cause (Fraser 1985, 37). This attachment informs the questions they ask and the assumptions they think of as non-negotiable, but it does not *necessarily* involve a slide into unreflective dogmatic political allegiance or a disregard for established empirical findings.

Another attractive feature of this approach is that it is arguably just more up front about its political commitments: neutrality can often serve as little more than a guise for defence of the state quo. This is also

²² This is especially true given the way some libertarian political philosophy is funded by the benefactors of the economic status quo in much the same way that many climate science sceptics are funded by fossil fuel companies (Herzog 2018).

clearly *something* of a risk with attempts at scientific neutrality, but arguments like McDermott's miss the many constitutive differences between study of the natural world and study of the realm of political ideas: attempts to apply the standard of neutrality from the former to the latter often just result in the repetition of whatever ideological claims currently happen to be considered "common sense."

A brief, final comment on the genesis of the ideas presented in what follows can further serve to illustrate this intermediary position between the extremes of uncritical partisanship and neutrality that I describe above. The two figures whose work has had the largest impact on the ideas I seek to defend in this project - even if their work is perhaps not overtly cited at every turn - are John Rawls, on the one hand, and György (Georg) Lukács on the other. I had originally come to LSE to write a critique of what I took to be liberal political theory's wishful thinking about the nature of capitalism. I had inherited the instinctive scepticism of anything that self-identified as "liberal" that is common among left-wing activists (and that often turns out to be well-founded) and consequently lumped Rawls in with the *bad* kind of liberals. Reading his work at the start of my PhD, however, I came to see how his novel defence of a liberal egalitarianism provided some powerful resources to offer a critique of capitalist society, at least as it is currently understood. I also came to admire the careful consideration of opposing views in his work and his constant emphasis on rigorous

argumentation and conceptual clarity.²³

But I nonetheless was still frustrated with the abstract and utopian quality of all of Rawls's work and quickly began to look outside of the liberal-analytical mainstream for more promising resources. Despite my reservations about Lukács's almost religious allegiance to the texts of a previous generation of writers and militants, this is how I came to see the value of his own, very different theoretical writings, which I read as a highly sophisticated - but oft-ignored - attempt to grapple with the questions of transition that barely feature in Rawls.²⁴ Detailing pictures of possible social realities and contemplating only abstract future political goals, without sketching a path towards them, Lukács wrote, meant these visions could easily "ossify into an alien existence" (Lukács 1971a [1923], 204). As a member of the Hungarian Communist Party between 1919 and 1929, Lukács developed a complex account of what he took to be the most desirable conception of class consciousness and painted a sophisticated picture of the different social and political dynamics that aided and obstructed its construction. This

²³ Tommie Shelby is perhaps the political philosopher who has done most to show how the emphasis placed by analytical methods on what he calls "conceptual clarity, logical rigor, and detailed argumentation" need not necessarily have conservative implications but can in fact aid a radical political project. See his discussion of what he calls "Afro-Analytical Marxism" in Shelby (forthcoming). It is these twin tools of conceptual analysis and rigorous attention to the sound construction of arguments that I think are the main contributions philosophers can make to solving the problem of egalitarian transition.

²⁴ The only context in which one is ever likely to encounter Lukács in a "top-tier" political science or philosophy journal is as an important influence for the literature on standpoint theory, although even here, discussion rarely goes beyond an approving mention in the footnotes (e.g., Srinivasan 2020, 411).

was a kind of theorizing that didn't just set up the future as a merely abstract possibility or ideal, but which also detailed what could realistically bring about an evolution towards this future world from the present.

Another feature of Lukács's biography that I came to see as making him a necessary interlocutor with Rawls's work on economic justice was that he spent great swathes of time actually seeking to put his philosophical conclusions into practice, whereas - as Simone Chambers has noted - most people have great difficulty imagining "the careful, gentle, and eminently sensible figure of John Rawls manning a barricade", or indeed, engaging in much in the way of concerted political activity at all (Chambers 2006, 81).²⁵ As deputy commissar of education in Hungary after the 1919 revolution, for instance, Lukács was involved in passing a series of policies - such as the extension of public secondary and university education, workers colleges, and a program of lectures against religion and the patriarchal family structure - that saw him actually practising what he preached about the shape of class consciousness and the way to build it (Lukács 1971b). You don't have to agree with the morality of everything Lukács did, or indeed with the plausibility of everything he argued, to see something admirable about this attempt to defuse the tension between theory and practice.

²⁵ This kind of view is also implicit in Edmundson's (2017) claim that even though Rawls was a socialist about economics, he was still a highly "reticent" one.

It is for this reason that I wanted the title of this work to reflect and mimic those of both the most famous works by these two authors (“A Theory of Justice” and “History and Class Consciousness”), hopefully combining in text both the idealism and analytical rigor of Rawls, and the attention to concrete realities and unshakeable commitment to contributing to processes of radical change we find in Lukács. Whether it is in fact possible to successfully combine these two approaches is, of course, precisely the nub of the criticism expressed by McDermott and others. Ultimately, however, the best way to alleviate this worry is probably just to demonstrate in practice what I take to be the valuable insights that can be delivered through such an approach.

2

Class and Class Consciousness:**Concepts and Conceptions**

My main aim in this chapter is to perform some of the necessary conceptual groundwork to defend my overall claim, that *raising class consciousness* ought to form part of the answer to the question of how to realise something like a property-owning democracy, liberal socialist, or social democratic state in the advanced capitalist democracies.

Disputes about the potential value or disvalue of raising class consciousness as a means of realizing a more egalitarian society are not aided by the fact that “class” and “class consciousness” are terms which many political philosophers and advocates of economic justice are currently highly sceptical of. Some have even claimed that class may be an “essentially contested concept” (Demertzis 1986, 159; cf. de Ste. Croix 1981, 31). So, before we can turn to constructing my argument in earnest, it is important to be able to offer a compelling account of the foundational ideas that will be central to my transitional theory.

The strategy I employ is loosely inspired by a phrase of Ronald Dworkin’s. Dworkin has claimed that terminology often has a “treelike structure”, with an abstract *concept* forming a “trunk”, and then a whole host of different *conceptions* forming the tree’s “branches” and sub-branches, jutting out in different directions from this singular base (Dworkin 1986, 70). Dworkin claims that first attempting to provide a

definition of the broad trunk-like concept of a disputed term - such as "classes" or "class consciousness" - before turning to the mapping out of the various specific conceptions of the term which interpret the concept's defining conditions in different ways, will often be an important way to "help to sharpen argument" (Dworkin 1986, 71).

Providing a definition of a broad *concept* involves describing "the most general and abstract propositions [...] that are uncontroversially employed in all [or at least most] interpretations" of the term (Dworkin 1986, 70-71; cf. List and Valentini 2016, 531). The idea here is that - provided we operate at a sufficiently high level of abstraction - even those who subscribe to very different accounts of the nature and consequence of a term like class should at least be able to agree on some of the basic defining conditions usually thought to be attached to the term. Then, with this trunk in place, we can begin to think about how different specific accounts of class "cash out" these defining conditions in different ways and thus result in different accounts of what classes are. One advantage of this strategy, in my view, is that it can demonstrate that at least some of the initial reasons readers might have for being wary of the concepts of class and class consciousness are in fact worries that attach to just particular *conceptions*, rather than to the concepts *tout court*.²⁶

²⁶ Rawls also draws the same distinction between concept and conception, although he - in my view - puts the point less clearly than Dworkin. For Rawls, a concept is "specified by the role which [...] different conceptions, have in common" (Rawls 1999a, 5). In the case of the concept of "social justice", for example, despite widespread disagreement over its precise content, all (or at least most), nonetheless

I proceed as follows. The next section outlines a broad and hopefully fairly uncontentious account of the broad nature of the *concept* of class, defined as a group of individuals that share positions within a social structure. I then turn, in the following two sections, to delineating the specific *conception* of economic class I will deploy throughout the thesis and explain how this specific conception avoids worries about it being outdated or archaic. My claim is that it is still possible to identify a capitalist, middle and working class in the advanced capitalist democracies based on the amounts of economic power different individuals within the social structure of production possess.

The final two sections then perform similar foundational conceptual work for the related notion of class consciousness. I define economic class consciousness as a complex of robustly action-guiding beliefs and desires about these power hierarchies in economic production. Finally, I distinguish my own favoured conception of class consciousness - what I call transformative egalitarian class consciousness - from other available conceptions of class consciousness based on the specific beliefs and desires that constitute this complex. Central to *transformative egalitarian* class consciousness, I claim, is: a

share a common understanding on the need for a term which refers to the absence of arbitrary distinctions made between persons in the distribution of important social benefits and burdens. It is just that with this loose concept, the defining conditions "are left open" and generally quite vague, such that different concrete *conceptions* can be seen as specifying more exactly what counts as an arbitrary distinction, for instance, or an important social benefit (Rawls 1999a, 5).

class belonging belief, a class inequality belief, a curtailing inequality desire and a collective working class action belief.

One final note. It would be possible to *skip* our attempts in this chapter to offer extended accounts of the notions of class and class consciousness and proceed straight to the construction of the arguments I develop in the rest of the thesis, if we just “plugged in”, say, one existing Marxist account of both concepts. But there is an important reason not to proceed in this way. Doing so would mean we would almost certainly lose a number of readers who would likely be unable to share in many of the presuppositions it is necessary to hold to find existing Marxist accounts of these terms compelling. This would mean we would be left preaching to the choir, so to speak: making a case to those who mostly *already* hold that class is significant and mostly *already* claim that raising class consciousness is an important goal. But part of what the thesis wants to achieve is to show that many liberals and “centrist” social democrats should *also* support a strategic political program that makes the raising of class consciousness central, if they want to achieve their preferred institutional transformations. This is the main reason why it is so important not to bake in too many assumptions to our accounts of the key terms in the thesis, and to start with a lengthy conceptual chapter.²⁷

²⁷ Part of the reason for a lack of existing rigorous conceptual accounts of class and class consciousness is that analytical political theorists almost never use the terms. One exception to this general trend is the work of EO Wright (1985), which I draw on extensively in what follows.

2.1 The concept of class

On the account I want to offer, the *concept* of a “class” - understood in the most abstract sense - simply denotes *a group of individuals that share positions within a social structure*. So, we can begin to get clearer on what “classes” are and who belongs in them, with an understanding of what social structures are:

A social structure: a fairly stable network of social relations, comprised of a series of divergently power-consequential *nodes*, and various *edges* which hold between them. Different nodes within the structure have different *occupancy prerequisites* attached to them, so which node a given agent occupies at a particular moment in time is a result of which prerequisites the agent can fulfil.

Let’s unpack this. First, what are “divergently power-consequential nodes”? Nodes are positions within a network of social relations that different agents can occupy. It is characteristic of social structures that whether one occupies one node rather than another tends to have different consequences for one’s ability to exercise various kinds of power. Nodes are thus “power-consequential” because they alter the options for the exercise of power open to the agent in a fundamental,

non-trivial way. What do I mean by power here? This is obviously a very complex question, perhaps one of the trickiest in all political and social theory.²⁸ But a useful starting point is that power derives from the latin *posse* or *potis*, meaning to “be able” (Hoad 1996, 364-5), with the usual implication of being able to effect, determine, bring about, or otherwise be causally decisive in some respect.

We can make a useful distinction between two broad kinds of ability to effect (rather than merely influence²⁹) usually thought to be central to power. On the one hand, there is the ability or capacity that a given agent has to intentionally effect, cause, or bring about *a specific outcome or state of affairs* (Abizadeh 2021, 3; Dowding 2021, 19; Morriss 2002, 32). And on the other, there is the ability or capacity that a given agent has to intentionally effect, cause, or bring about *a specific action in another agent* (or set of agents) (Abizadeh 2021, 12; cf. Allen 2021; Dahl 1957, 202; Dowding 2017; Dowding 2021, 20; Forst 2015, 115; Pansardi 2011; Saar 2010). I’ll call the former “*power to achieve outcomes*” and the latter “*power over others*.”

Thinking of power as a capacity or ability in this way means that, as Keith Dowding puts it, agents can “have powers they never use” or

²⁸ Following Keith Dowding, I think that “rather than seeing ‘power’ as a battleground concept for which one version needs to triumph (a zero-sum ‘power game’ version of academic debate), we can accept different uses in different contexts” (Dowding 2012, 122). Martin Haugaard also states that “*There is no general definition of power that is better than all others*” (Haugaard 2020, 8).

²⁹ The ability to exercise power is usually thought to be distinct from mere “affecting”, which is better thought of as indeterminate or inconclusive *influence* or *pressure* (Dowding 2011; Morriss 2002).

exercise (Dowding 2021, 19): what is being maintained is that *if* the agent were to intend to bring about or effect some state of affairs or action in another, they would be able to do so.³⁰ Essentially, my claim is that where you are positioned in a given social structure has different consequences for your capacity to exercise both your *power to achieve outcomes* and your *power over others*. In other words, the extent of the power “possibility space” one occupies will vary depending on the node one occupies (Haslanger 2016, 127; Young 2011, 53).³¹

Social structures tend to be *divergently* power-consequential: they generally do not *equally* determine the power possibility space of all node-occupiers, but rather do so in different ways and to differing extents. The different nodes within social structures “provide [differing] opportunities for” particular concrete agents to exercise the various kinds of power, as Rainer Forst has put it (Forst 2015, 120; cf. Brännmark 2021, 234; Young 2011, 60). Some agents will occupy positions that enable them to roam across a fairly broad power possibility space, whereas others will occupy positions with a comparatively more constrained power possibility space, with only a

³⁰ To hold, on the contrary, that power only exists when it is being exercised is to commit what is often called the “exercise fallacy.” See Morriss (2002; 2011).

³¹ One can hold this view about social structures being power-consequential *without* committing to the view that *every* constraint or enablement on my power possibility space at any given moment will always best be thought of as a direct result of my position within a given structure. Certain biological and physical features of individual agents and the physical environment, as well as contingencies of individual behaviour and interaction which are not structurally determined, can of course also constrain and enable power in various ways.

narrow field of possible *power tos* and *power overs* open to them.

What then, are the “various *edges* which hold between and connect the different nodes” within a social structure? These are *relations* holding between and connecting these varied node-occupiers with other node-occupiers (Haslanger 2016, 113; Ritchie 2020, 405). The exact content of these edges depends on the social structure in question. Sometimes these edges or rules will be formally legally codified, whereas at other times they are better understood as informal customs or norms.

Some of the most significant agency-consequential social structures in contemporary societies include the patriarchal or “gender” social structure and the white supremacist or “racial” social structure, although of course there are also others (Haslanger 2012; Ritchie 2020, 409). Consider briefly the patriarchal social structure: the normalization of the feminine “second shift” of care-giving duties, and the persistent threat of sexual harassment and male violence which this structure entails for those who occupy certain nodes within it, plays a substantial role in reducing the power possibility space for many female agents in society.³² A female can therefore be said to occupy a position below their male partner within this structure, for instance,

³² A useful account of patriarchy as a social structure can be found in Brännmark (2021). See also Walby (1990). We can of course make similar claims about racial social structures. If an agent occupies the relatively disadvantaged office of “a black person” in this structure, this means they will typically have their power possibility space constrained and enabled in different ways to those who occupy the node of “white person”. For an influential definition of structural racism, see Bonilla-Silva (1997). See also Griffith (2020).

and be connected to them by way of a series of edges with content like “is expected to do the lion’s share of shopping, cooking and cleaning for”, “is expected to be continually sexually available to”, “is expected to passively defer to the judgement of”, and so on (Brännmark 2021, 235-6).³³

Note that my broad definition of social structure doesn’t say anything about the morality or immorality of the exercise (or possession of the capacity to exercise) the powers that are divergently distributed within a given social structure. In the social structures of the family or the school, for instance, part of what it is to occupy the node of a “parent” or “teacher” is to have a different power possibility space (and be connected by different edges) to those designated as “children.” It thus strikes me as plausible that - at least some of the time - the existence within a social structure of divergently power-consequential nodes will be morally justified. Making a claim that possession of a given type of power is unjust generally involves making a claim about what relations of power over and what opportunities for power to achieve outcomes are in people’s “real” or “basic” moral interests, but my generic description of social structural power embeds no such claims directly into its account: further theoretical steps that I do not take here are required to establish the injustice or justice of a given

³³ Part of what these “edges” do is decide how various material resources or goods are distributed. For more on the idea that social structures are “built from both human and non-human material parts” see Elder-Vass (2017). Haslanger (e.g., 2012) also makes “resources” central to her account of social structure.

social structure's distribution of power.³⁴

In a social structure, the idea is that these various nodes and edges I have described come together to form what I have termed "a fairly stable network", which configures and gives a particular shape to social relations. In other words, these networks of social relations tend to be what Haslanger calls "relatively rigid" persisting over time (Haslanger 2016, 128; Martin and Lee 2015, 713). The question of which specific mechanisms cause social structures to be durable in this way and persist over time is of course a much disputed one, but some of the most commonly cited mechanisms include: structure-upholding beliefs held by node-occupiers, the use or threatened use of coercive force by node-occupiers with a more extensive power possibility space, and various material and symbolic incentives to maintain the structure (Soon 2021). I do not take a stance on these myriad debates here, and simply emphasise that all these accounts of social structural reproduction share a conception of social structures as relatively rigid and persisting over time. Of course, no social structure is completely rigid, static, or unchanging: the specific nature of the nodes and edges

³⁴ This is one of the problems, in my view, with Steven Lukes's (2005, 30) famous definition of power ("A exercises power over B when A affects B in a manner contrary to B's interests"): as Forst points out, because of its normatively-loaded reference to "real interests", this is actually "much closer to a definition of *domination*" than it is to a general definition of power (Forst 2015, 113). For a more detailed defence of the claim that concepts of power "should be kept as non-normative as possible" see Dowding (2012, 121ff.). And for a very useful overview of the many different ways scholars have conceptualised the type of power at play when domination takes place, see McCammon (2018, section four).

that make up a given social structure can certainly change. But they tend at least to endure over *significant stretches of time* prior to substantive changes taking place.

What then are the “*occupancy prerequisites* attached to” different nodes within social structures? The basic idea here is that one cannot, just as a matter of will, always put oneself in a different position or node within a given social structure, just because one wishes that it were so, because not all offices within these structures are “open” to all agents at all times. As Katherine Ritchie notes, this is because it is characteristic of social structures that positions within them come with “requirements on node-occupation” (2020, 416).

In white supremacist and patriarchal social structures, for example, the occupation requirement is a *physical marker* of some kind. Individuals occupy divergently power-consequential nodes within these structures based on whether or not they are regularly observed (or imagined) to have particular bodily features that are presumed to be proof of either “ancestral links to a certain geographical region” in the former case, or “a female’s biological role in reproduction” in the latter (Haslanger 2000, 43-4; Griffith 2020).

To be clear: that different nodes have differing occupancy prerequisites does not necessarily entail individuals having a “permanent station” in a social structure throughout their life. For example, even if occupancy prerequisites remain broadly unchanged, the ways in which a given node is power-consequential can change significantly over time (we might think of the way the power possibility

space open to women in the patriarchal social structure is now generally regarded to be very different - if still highly divergent from men - from the way it was described by Wollstonecraft in her 1792 *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, say). Similarly, individuals might develop ways to meet the occupation requirements for a different position within a social structure over time, and thus change node (we might think here of the phenomenon of *racial passing*, as illustrated in, for instance, Roth's *The Human Stain*). But the idea is that these occupational prerequisites will often at least resign individuals to particular positions within a structure for lengthy periods of time.

So, in the broadest possible terms, we can understand a social structure as a fairly rigid network of social relations that is power-consequential for those who occupy the different nodes within it. And a "class" is then simply a group of individuals that *share power-consequences within* this structure: a given set of individuals can be said to form a collective class when the social structure is power-consequential in a clustering or patterned - rather than a completely dispersed - way. If, looking at a social structure, we determine that a whole variety of node-occupiers face relevantly similar constraints on their power possibility space (or indeed their possibility space is similarly *enabled*) when it comes to deciding how to act along some dimension or in some context, we can accurately state that they form a class.

It will be rare indeed, of course, for individuals to share *exactly the same* power possibility space with other node-occupiers. But given

the fact that there are typically a limited range of constraints or enablements that social structures tend to set up, it is usually taken to be plausible that agents will “tend to group together” or cluster within social structures in certain ways, at least to some extent (Keister and Southgate 2012, 132). This is why, for example, Haslanger sometimes speaks of “the social classes [of] men and women” in a patriarchal society (Haslanger 2000, 42) and we can also speak of “racial classes” (Montgomery 2011, 48ff; cf. Griffith 2020).³⁵

I thus hope to have shown that class - understood in the broadest possible terms - is a concept which can be applied just as easily to discussions of the white supremacist and patriarchal social structures, as it can to those to do with the social structure of economic production (where it is admittedly most commonly deployed). Of course, though, the family of conceptions of class that I am primarily interested in in what follows are those related to *economic* classes, so it is to the construction of a non-archaic conception of economic class to which I now turn in the following two sections.

³⁵ Shulamith Firestone (1970) also uses the phrases “sex class” and “the sexual class system” throughout her influential *Dialectic of Sex* (e.g., Firestone 1970, 1-5). And Sheila Jeffreys (1977) also famously distinguished between what she called “the economic class system based on the relationship of people to production” and “the sex-class system, based on the relationship of people to reproduction.”

2.2 The social structure of production and the capitalist class

The social structure of economic production, in my view, refers to the fairly stable network of social relations within a society which enables the generation or creation of both (a) tangible or material goods and (b) intangible services.³⁶ Examples of tangible goods created during economic production include Fiat cars and Glenmorangie whiskey, and examples of more intangible services include a property-owner letting out an apartment to a tenant, and Britain's education and healthcare systems (Black, Hashimzade and Myles 2013, 176; 324; 369; Pearce 1992, 347; 390).³⁷

Production of these varied goods and services ("outputs") typically requires the use of various "factors of production" or "primary inputs" (Black, Hashimzade and Myles 2013, 150; 211; Hennings 2016

³⁶ The phrase "social structure of production" is used in passing by both Immanuel Wallerstein (Wallerstein and Hopkins 2016, 172) and Daniel Brudney (2014, 465), although it is not clear if they intend it to mean exactly what I have in mind here.

³⁷ I do not draw, as is common, a stark distinction between "*economic* production" (where money is taken to change hands) and "*social* reproduction" (where many material goods and services are also being created - knitted sweatshirts, hot dinners, clean dishes – but no money changes hands). The possibilities for a robust distinction between these two realms is something I intend to explore more in future work but which I do not have a settled view on as of yet. Some authors also exclude so-called "rentier" activities from the economic realm proper, on the basis that nothing substantial is produced, but I group such activities under the provision of services (Wright 2005, 2; Adkins, Cooper and Konings, 2021).

[1987]; Pearce 1992, 149; 319).³⁸ Among the major factors are:

Labour (or “human services” or “human resources”): the exertion of mental or physical effort by human agents (Black, Hashimzade and Myles 2013, 150; 231; Edgeworth 2016 [1987]; Pearce 1992, 246).

Capital goods: durable material or physical resources like: buildings (warehouses, offices, shopfronts, blocks of flats), equipment and machinery (cameras, shovels, tunnel borers, computers and the software they run), and vehicles (ships, cars, trucks, planes). These are resources which are made and maintained through prior human effort and which are not immediately exhausted (even if there is wear and tear) during a period of production (Black, Hashimzade and Myles 2013, 48-50; Hagemann 2016 [1987]; Pearce 1992, 49-50).

Finance capital: loaned or saved money, stocks or shares

³⁸ One of course needs to be sensitive to the dangers of how the language and assumptions of contemporary economics can act as an apologia for inegalitarian capitalism, but it is worth pointing out that this basic terminology contains little ideological baggage by itself: “production”, in these terms, can be undertaken by many different kinds of entities (private firms, but also governments and worker cooperatives) and with varying aims in mind (maximizing profit, meeting basic needs, and so on).

to buy and invest in other factors of production (or financial instruments of some kind) (Black, Hashimzade and Myles 2013, 153; Pearce 1992, 153-4).

Natural resources (or “external nature”): like land, trees, water, wind, sun, minerals, oil, animals, grains, and other crops (Edgeworth 2016 [1987]; (Black, Hashimzade and Myles 2013, 150; 276; Hennings 2016 [1987]; Pearce 1992, 239).

Just as with the patriarchal and racial social structures described above, the social structure of economic production is also comprised of a series of divergently power-consequential *nodes*, and various *edges* which hold between them. And different nodes within the structure also have different *occupancy prerequisites* attached to them, so which node a given agent occupies at a particular moment in time is a result of which prerequisites the agent can fulfil. In general, which node one occupies in the social structure of production depends on which factor(s) of production one can deploy in productive activity, and what specific type of that factor one has (e.g., how skilled the labour is, how sophisticated the capital goods are, how in demand the natural resources are, and so on).

Thus, in the social structure of economic production, in contrast to white supremacist and patriarchal structures, rather than it being

possession (or perceived possession) of certain *bodily features* that determines which node one is able to occupy (Haslanger 2000, 43-4), what matters is that individuals are able (or are perceived by others to be able, in interviews and during job searches, for example) to deploy a given kind of factor of production in economic activity.

The overall approach to dividing up the social structure of production into distinct classes I want to describe and deploy in what follows is roughly the approach taken by authors like Bottomore (1989), Domhoff (2022), Miliband (1987), Moody (2017), Wright (1985) and Zweig (2012).³⁹ This approach identifies a capitalist, middle and working class on the basis of the amounts of economic power different individuals within the social structure of production possess.

Consider first those agents who sit at the very top of the hierarchy on the particular conception of economic class I will deploy throughout this thesis: *the capitalist class*. Most accounts agree that this group amounts to little more than about two percent of the labour force (Coates 1989, 34; Foster and Holleman 2010, 196; Ikeler and Limonic 2018; Leys 2013, 117; Moody 2017; Serfati 2013; Wolff and Zacharias 2013, 1384; Wright 1985; Zweig 2012). This is the group that privately owns the major capital goods in society. Interestingly, despite the

³⁹ We could potentially just call this “the Marxist conception”, but I am not convinced that Marx himself consistently deployed anything like this conception. Because the planned chapter on class in Capital Vol. 3 was never completed, this is a question to which we will likely never know the answer. For one particularly compelling demonstration of the various ways in which economic “power over” is central to the Marxist account of class, see Palermo (2007).

“globalisation” discourse, there is little evidence for a completely or even mainly *transnational* capitalist class. As Carroll puts it, “The vast majority of the world’s capitalists [...] are not transnationally invested.” For example: “American investors own on average 84% of the shares of the largest 50 US-based corporations.” (Carroll 2018, 193-194; cf. Serfati 2013). Most members of the capitalist class thus continue to own and operate largely within the confines of their own nation.⁴⁰ The power possibility space of this small group of agents generally contains two main sub-species of power that are of crucial importance: one related to *power to*, and the other to *power over*, both of which I will now briefly summarise.

Recall that the power to achieve outcomes refers to the ability or capacity that a given agent has to intentionally effect, cause, or bring about *a specific state of affairs*. We can thus state that economic “power to” entails having the ability to intentionally effect a specific economic outcome. The most important economic “power to” possessed by members of the capitalist class is the ability to effect or bring about a whole range of states of affairs with the capital goods which they control, and (assuming the property is profitable) also the productive surplus which their rights over capital goods grant them control of. Capitalists can bring about the reinvestment of this surplus in labour-

⁴⁰ What does seem clear, however, is that the capitalist class of present times is considerably more globally interconnected than was the case in previous centuries. For example, Burris and Staples (2012) highlight how geographic divides between Europe and North America have become less important to many members of the capitalist class based in these places (cf. Carroll 2013).

saving technology, or in higher wages for employees, for instance, or can distribute it as dividends, to themselves or others. They even have the ability to effect a state of affairs in which they cease to engage in wage labour of any kind, either for an extended break, or for the rest of their lives, but are still able to meet most or all their varied needs.⁴¹ Many members of this class may choose not to exercise this specific power, of course, but the fact remains that this is a live possibility within their action set.

Recall that wielding power over another entails having the ability or capacity to intentionally effect, cause, or bring about a specific action in this other agent. We can thus state that economic “power over” entails having the ability to intentionally effect a specific economic action in another agent. Members of the capitalist class have the power to cause those they employ to engage in various activities, and in specific ways, determining, for example, the specific nature of the tasks they undertake, the intensity of the work, the degree of oversight or monitoring involved, and so on. Capitalists also have the power to cause those who operate the levers of government to structure the background “rules of the game” for the social structural of production (Arnold 2017, 116) in a manner that is favourable to their interests, causing elected officials to pass particular laws and policies on working

⁴¹ This is sometimes termed “exit power.” They can achieve this state of affairs by “cashing out” their productive property, investing it in a range of low-risk financial assets with a (more or less) guaranteed return sufficient to live off, and/or through hiding their wealth by using some of it to employ lawyers and other members of the so-called “wealth defence industry” (Collins 2021).

conditions, hours, wages, taxation and capital mobility, the legality of protest and trade unionism, voting restrictions, campaign finance rules, welfare support and “red tape” regulations. This in turn structures the space within which they have power over specific employees.

Of course, a capitalist is never omnipotent in these respects: they have power over others *within certain limits*. Possessing power over others doesn’t mean all other agents are, to use a phrase of Brian Barry’s, “merely puppets” (2002, 177). Capitalists must pay attention to considerations of what can feasibly be produced, for example, as well as what is likely to make a profit, what is likely to make them competitive with rival capitalists, and so on. Capitalists must generally, for instance, at least under competitive labour market conditions, “offer terms [to their employees] that are no worse than those offered by any of their competitors” (Arnold 2017, 120). But the fact that the various powers of this group exist within certain limits does not mean that this power does not exist.

There are various specific means that a member of the capitalist class, as a powerful agent, can intentionally use to effect these economic outcomes and to cause elected officials and its employees to do these various things (Forst 2015, 124). One obvious means at their disposal in terms of power over employees is to issue *orders* or *commands* to those deploying labour power that are perceived as legitimate because of codified and informal laws and norms. These powers are sometimes exerted directly by the capitalist themselves: if they own majority shares in a firm, they obviously have the privilege of getting to set

productive priorities without consulting others. In other cases, they employ “principals” or “surrogates” (managers) to carry out these powers on their behalf. So, having the legal authority to formulate or set production priorities eventually results in specific instructions being delivered to employees by their supervisors, and specific outcomes being delivered with the capitalist’s productive property. The causal chains are of course often somewhat diffuse: a capitalist might command a manager or executive to deliver a certain outcome, who in turn sets orders for those lower down the firm hierarchy, who in turn, pass the orders on to the employee, and so on.

Another set of means at the disposal of the capitalist class is to effect or cause specific psychological states or dispositions in other agents as a somewhat indirect way of then causing them to act or behave in a way that is in conformity with their will. So, a member of the capitalist class might seek to change the beliefs other agents hold about what they want to or need to or should do through employing rationally persuasive (or deceptive or misleading!) advertising and political campaigns (perhaps through funding sympathetic candidates and parties, lobby groups, think tanks, and so on). Capitalists can also achieve this through direct ownership of television news and newspapers, or through the influence gained over news content through providing advertising revenue stream to these venues.⁴²

⁴² It is sometimes claimed that attributing powers of these sorts to the media is unrealistic, and that in reality the media only reinforces pre-existing attitudes among the citizenry, rather than creating new ones out of whole cloth. But in a comprehensive recent review of the

Another means at the disposal of the capitalist class is to issue coercive threats to other agents that are perceived as credible, which can ensure these agents act in a desired way (Forst 2015, 115). To make a coercive threat is to propose to cause or to fail to prevent a consequence that the coerced agent finds intolerably costly, or that they perceive as making them unacceptably worse off, conditional on the coerced *not* acting as the coercer wishes (Barry 2002, 178; Feinberg 1986, 198). What makes coercion distinctive from the belief-altering means described above is that the coerced agent *remains somewhat resistant* to performing the action, but performs it grudgingly anyway, to avoid a cost they regard as unacceptable, whereas if belief-altering has taken place, the agent is moved to act in the way the powerful agent desires of their own volition. Feinberg uses the metaphor of the coercer placing an unacceptably high “price tag” on certain options, from the point of view of the coerced: thereby making them choose as the coercer intends (Feinberg 1986, 192).

The paradigmatic example of the coercive threat that the capitalist can issue is the threat of capital flight or strike to elected officials. By threatening to pull investment, or promising to make

literature, Neil T Gavin concludes that this so-called “minimalist influence thesis”, or MIT, is essentially without foundation. He argues that there is in fact “ample evidence that the media can impact on attitude formation, especially (but not exclusively) where the public are dependent on coverage, have weak partisan predispositions, or where reporting is uniform or near-uniform across a range of sources. Furthermore, it should be appreciated that the media’s capacity to reinforce pre-existing attitudes – whether these attitudes relate to the EU, immigration, benefit fraud or climate change – is a significant power in its own right” (Gavin 2018, 840).

investment of a certain kind, elites can extract a range of policy concessions and keep punitive measures off the political agenda (Young, Banerjee and Schwartz 2018; cf. Lindblom 2001, 247; Przeworski and Wallerstein 1986). The causal chains are again somewhat diffuse: government officials, fearing the public outcry and loss of support from an economic downturn, will sometimes act in ways favourable to capitalists to prevent making voters angry with them (Barry 2002, 182). Other coercive threats include the threat to run unfavourable coverage about politicians (Jacobs, Matthews, Hicks and Merkley 2021) or to fail to provide a so-called “golden parachute” post-political career to non-compliant electoral representatives (Weschle 2021), or, in the case of coercive threats over one’s employees, to threaten to terminate the contract of an employee conditional on them acting in a certain way.⁴³

Usually, some combination of all these means are in play. For example, commands are made in the workplace that might be seen as legitimate, but even when they are not, the assumption of the employee will often be that a refusal to obey will be backed up by the coercive threat of terminating the contract of employment, and so on.

In my view, part of what is distinctive about the conception of class I am describing here is the centrality it ascribes to these relations of power over both elected officials and employees granted to members

⁴³ Sometimes a coercive threat becomes an actual act of compulsion. A member of the capitalist class may go on strike or rely on police or military force to defend its property rights, and so on. These also serve to enhance the credibility of future threats made to others.

of the capitalist class by the current social structure of production. This means this is a model of class centrally concerned with relations *between* groups, rather than just with what is distinctive about separate groups understood in isolation. Wood pejoratively describes mainstream sociological accounts of class as what she calls “geological” models of class, in which different classes occupy unconnected and largely distinct layers according to some individualistic criteria like income or opportunities (as in the distinct parallel bands of contrasting types of rock or sediment that lie atop of one another often observable on exposed cliff-sides and studied by geologists). What this disguises, for Wood, are the various ways in which members of different classes sit in power-imbalanced social *relations* with one another (Wood 1995, 76). I think that Wood is right that conceptions of class that are mostly non-relational and geological are unlikely to single out the capitalist class because part of what makes this group distinct is the extent of power it wields over both employees and elected officials within society.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Wood seems to assume that to build a relational model of class just *is* to make what she calls “exploitative and antagonistic social relations” central to our conception of class (Wood 1995, 94). But my way of dividing up those who occupy different nodes within the social structure of production does not make the claim by itself that it is *wrong* for the capitalist class to possess these kinds of powers over and to (although I do happen to think that this is the case), because this is a *further* theoretical step that I don’t think it is necessary to make here.

2.3 A non-archaic conception of the working and middle class

At the bottom of the social structure of production, on the conception of economic class I am developing here, we find *the working class*.

Accounts differ as to the exact size of this group, but many accounts end up with a figure of 50-60 percent of the labour force (Draut 2016; Ikeler and Limonic 2018; Moody 2017; Schutz 2011, 96; Wolff and Zacharias 2013; Wright 1985; Zweig 2012). It centrally includes teaching assistants, nursery assistants, bus and lorry drivers, postal workers, hospital porters, bar staff, waiting staff, caretakers, cleaners, bricklayers and construction workers, bank tellers, supermarket cashiers, refuse collection workers, secretarial workers, hospital and social care nurses, warehouse pickers, call-centre workers, and falsely “self-employed” precarious workers, like taxi drivers.⁴⁵

Recall the two main sub-species of power that I claimed were of crucial importance in distinguishing the capitalist class: one related to power to, and the other power over. On the one hand, members of this class have the economic “power to” intentionally effect or bring about a whole range of states of affairs with the productive property which they control, and (assuming the property is profitable) also the productive

⁴⁵ Despite this list, it is certainly not my intention in what follows to specify *exactly* which class *everyone* who occupies a non-capitalist node within the social structure of economic production in the advanced capitalist nations belongs to. I intend to keep the edges and boundaries between classes somewhat fuzzy, as empirical research is likely necessary to decisively conclude some of these issues. But these examples of paradigmatically working class occupations should nonetheless help to fix ideas.

surplus which their rights over productive property grant them control of. Members of the working class, by contrast, engage in economic production under highly routinized and standardised conditions, and *lack the exit power that would enable them to withdraw from the productive process* (they must engage in paid labour of some kind to meet their basic needs), at least until they have reached the required age to access a pension. And in terms of “power over”: members of the working class do not direct or control or manage anyone else in the productive process and are simply *directed and managed* by others. The power possibility of the working class is thus considerably smaller, in certain crucial respects, than that of the capitalist class.

Between the working class and the capitalist class we find the middle classes (Walker 1979). Again, exact estimates of its size differ, but Zweig (2012) and Ikeler and Limonic (2018) claim that this group generally amounts to around the remaining 30-40 per cent of the labour force of advanced capitalist nations like the United States. This group includes small business owners (including those “rentiers” whose business is just being a professional landlord), as well as doctors, lawyers, accountants, architects, professors, managers and supervisors, and so on.

The power possibility space of those who belong to the middle class is far more constrained than that of the capitalist class (because they lack ownership of major capital goods, members of this class lack the power to effect or bring about the range of states of affairs with productive property and its surpluses that capitalists can). But this

group generally have a much more secure, less precarious role in the production process. This might be because they own their own means of subsistence, or because they have a set of skills that are sufficiently scarce to grant them more bargaining power with their employer, or because they receive a sufficiently high income that they have access to savings that means they are not so reliant on undertaking paid labour to meet their basic needs, at least over the short-term. Members of this class also have a lot more power to determine the exact content and pace of the productive activities they undertake in their workday, *and* they have power over many of those in the working class, as their work generally involves issuing various commands to them (think of the power of the doctor over the nurse, for instance).⁴⁶

It is important to clarify this conception of economic classes to avoid misconceptions. Perhaps the main reason that attempting to make the language of class central to debates about social justice is sure to raise the hackles of many contemporary political philosophers is that, for many academics and members of the citizenry more broadly, “class” is now considered to be an outdated term, which may once have formed an important analytic tool, but which no longer even halfway captures the many complexities of contemporary society (Evans and Tilley 2017, 43-4; Pakulski and Waters 1995). We can call this *the*

⁴⁶ Note one way in which this conception of economic class is different from a straightforward division of the labour force into income bands: musicians and actors might earn so much that they belong in the top one percent income band, but assuming they do not own any major capital goods, they do not count as part of the capitalist class, on this account.

archaism objection. The *Cambridge Dictionary of Linguistics* defines an archaism as a “word or construction retained from an older form of the language” but which is no longer in general spoken or written use. It gives the example of the use of terms like “heretofore” and “thou art” in some legal and religious discourse (Brown and Miller 2013, 34; cf. Crystal 2008, 33). Such terms are now generally obsolete or redundant, as they have been replaced with much more widespread phrases like “until now/before now” and “you are”.

According to this objection, attempts to divide contemporary societies up into a working class and a capitalist class (for instance) are now just as redundant and antiquated: the old divides that characterised Western societies in the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution are said to have subsided, and the term is thus often thought to be little more than a misleading hangover from social theorising that took place during this time. Proponents of the archaism objection certainly do not have to claim that there are now no material differences of any kind between individuals in advanced capitalist societies, only that it no longer makes much sense to think of these differences as mapping onto discrete and homogeneous classes.

In response, it is important to make two points. First, many readers will have certain preconceptions about what counts as a working class or middle class role that does not neatly align with the conception I have been delineating here. For example, some people subscribe to an idea of someone being working class that involves them performing (archetypally very masculine) work that uses picks, shovels,

and hammers, that gets one's "hands dirty", and that is often quite dangerous or at least highly physically demanding (Hobsbawm 1981, 3). People that work in such roles are certainly part of the working class, but they form a now small (and shrinking) subsection of it in the advanced capitalist democracies (Gallie 2000). The working class, taken as a whole, doesn't just include *manual* workers, and it also certainly doesn't just include (so-called) "unskilled" labour, and it also doesn't just include *highly impoverished* workers, and it also doesn't just include workers of any one gender or race: those who occupy working class nodes are highly diverse.

In short, when individuals talk about "the death of class" or everyone now being "middle class", they are generally talking about a very different conception of class to the one I have outlined above. Perhaps fewer people now strongly *identify* as working class than was once the case (although even this is empirically disputed), or perhaps the material conditions of some of the most disadvantaged are now on-par with what was once considered a middle-class lifestyle (with many now able to take holidays abroad, own televisions, mobile phones and dine out regularly). But our societies are still - indisputably, it seems to me - starkly divided along the lines of political and economic decision-making power, and thus we can certainly still assign individuals into meaningful class groups on the basis of these divergent power possibility spaces. It is thus not that the fairly rigid nodes and edges have disappeared, but just that their precise content and shape has altered in various ways (Atkinson 2017, 22; Zweig 2012, 39).

The second point it is important to make in responding to the archaism objection is that it is also certainly false, in my view, to try to claim that common class membership involves anything like a homogeneous lived experience. One reason for this is that members of the working class and middle class, as defined here, clearly stand in a very wide range of different kinds of specific relationship to their employer, with the content of the contracts they sign with employers being of many different kinds. Here are some examples: some members of the working class will have the luxury of predictable and secure salaries, incremental salary rises, good pension prospects, opportunities for promotion, and so on, whilst others will face a far greater deal of fluctuation in the stability and predictability of their earnings.⁴⁷ We might also add to this list differences in the degree of social status or social recognition members of the working class receive from the work they perform, differences in ability to access a mortgage, amount of hours worked, whether one's work is in the public or private sector, and so on. And of course, the precise kind of treatment by managers and amount of income, extent of routinisation and standardisation exposed to will also vary. There is thus an enormous amount of variation and diversity within the working class (Vidal 2018).

Another part of the explanation for why there is no

⁴⁷ These are some of the differences that Goldthorpe makes central to his own class schema (e.g., Goldthorpe 2007; Goldthorpe and McKnight 2006). See also the discussion of labour market "insiders" and "outsiders" in Rueda (2007).

homogeneous lived experience among members of the middle or working classes is that, as I have already briefly discussed, many other social structures also organise and configure social interaction in complex societies, and these structures overlap in complex and intricate ways with the social structure of economic production. Occupation of certain nodes in the patriarchal structure can interact with the nodes one is likely to find oneself occupying in the class structure, for instance, perhaps reducing one's prospects for securing a pensionable, full-time job. Or an association in the minds of employers between black people and an aggressive and law-breaking disposition, for instance, might impact the ability of people of colour to come to control or deploy certain productive resources, or lead to particularly unfair treatment from their superiors.⁴⁸

The precise way in which one's access to resources is determined by the class structure thus crucially depends on *how the node one holds in this structure interacts and intersects with the offices one holds in the many other social structures that characterize complex societies*. The exact nature of the power possibility space one is likely to have is the result of the interpenetration of one's position within

⁴⁸ It might be objected that it is a mistake to even treat these different hierarchical social structures as logically separable at all, given their intermeshing and overlapping nature. I do not have a settled view on this question and am sympathetic to this objection, but I share Ritchie's hunch that - at least for analytical purposes - it is probably "better to posit distinct structures" (Ritchie 2020, 418). Haslanger also makes the point that these different social structures are "analytical categories that can be used to explain certain features of the [overall social] system" (Haslanger 2020, 226).

multiple social structures and it is not *only* the position one occupies in the class structure that determines this. Given the existence of several other highly impactful intersecting structures, there is thus unlikely to be anything like complete uniformity to the exact nature of the impact that the class structure will have on different officeholders within the structure (Bohrer 2020, 255). To borrow another phrase from Haslanger, it seems clear that individuals are affected by their position in the class structure “to different degrees and in different ways, depending on what other social positions they occupy” in *other* social structures (Haslanger 2012, 326; Haslanger 2020, 226 fn. 6).

Of course, there are various other available ways to group individuals who occupy nodes within the social structure of production into distinct classes. There are, in short, many other “cartographers of class” that divide the social structure of production up in a different way to the way I have done so here (Therborn 2002, 222). My claim here is certainly not that the particular conception of economic class that I have delineated here will *always* provide the most appropriate lens through which to analyse social life. In my view, the most useful conception of class depends on the specific question one is seeking to answer. Different conceptions of economic class are often trying to answer different questions: questions about inequalities in life chances, political conflict, social emancipation, consciousness and identity, distribution, and so on (Wright 2005, 180-1). The question I am eventually seeking to answer in this early part of the thesis is: which social groups within the advanced capitalist democracies constitute

serious obstacles to the achievement of egalitarian economic justice?

Thus, my claim is only that *when it comes to this question*, a conception of economic class which isolates the capitalist class as a distinct grouping is crucial.⁴⁹

The remarks in this section and the previous one clearly raise many pressing empirical questions which it is beyond the scope of this thesis to tackle in depth. But I nonetheless hope to have done enough to demonstrate that a plausible conception of economic class which identifies a capitalist, middle, and working class can nonetheless be utilised to divide up advanced capitalist democracies such as the UK.

2.4 The concept of class consciousness

With a rough conception of economic class now in place, I turn to the analysis of class consciousness. The concept of class consciousness was once a familiar topic in Marxist political thought, where it was understood as the so-called “subjective factor” that would help bring along the objective and inevitable transition of capitalist societies into communist ones (e.g., Marcuse 1969, 28; Reich 2012 [1934], 278). But there is - perhaps surprisingly - now relatively little extensive

⁴⁹ Bourdieuan approaches to class, for instance, do not generally identify three classes along these lines. They lump in members of the capitalist class with a much larger “dominant class” which even includes *teachers* (Bourdieu 1984; Hugrée, Pénissat, and Spire 2020). And Weberian approaches to class, similarly, also do not identify a distinct capitalist class, focusing most of their analysis on a privileged “*salariat*” (Goldthorpe 2007; Marshall, Swift and Roberts 1998, 26).

discussion of the concept of class consciousness and its meaning over recent years in Marxist journals (Smith 2017).

How then, should we understand the term? I claim that the best way to understand the “consciousness” typically referred to in class consciousness is as *a belief-desire complex*: a network of certain beliefs and desires possessed by an individual human agent. To begin with, it would generally seem very odd to say, for example, that a non-human animal, or a natural event, such as an earthquake, possessed consciousness of power hierarchies in economic production. Consequently, we can arguably limit the concept of class consciousness to that of the conscious thought of human agents.⁵⁰ And in general, *group* consciousness is just a simple aggregate or summation of or derivation from the views of its members.

Is there a worry here that limiting the focus to single agents is too methodologically individualist? Isn’t class consciousness something that is more accurately spoken of as being the property of a *group*, rather than an individual? But I follow Wright here, in his view that “supra-individual entities [such as classes] [...] do not have consciousness in the literal sense, since they are not the kind of entities which have minds, which think, weigh alternatives, have preferences, etc” (Wright 1985, 243). When we speak about the class consciousness of a group, at least on my account, this is usually just a shorthand,

⁵⁰ It is true that cultural artefacts created by class conscious agents - such as albums, films, plays or books - are also often said to possess or display a class consciousness themselves, but I take this to be an exception to the most common use of the term.

indirect way of saying that some or most or all the individuals within the group have that consciousness.⁵¹

Of course, not every specific conception of class consciousness will agree that it is feasible for *every* human agent to come to possess class consciousness, but it does not make sense, I think, to include a restriction on which specific sub-group of human agents (such as members of the working class) can realistically possess it at the conceptual stage. Leaving this condition open to all allows our conceptual definition to capture not just familiar references to the class consciousness of the working class, but also (less common, but still relatively widespread) references to the class consciousness of the capitalist class. Aeron Davis, for instance, describes and measures what he calls “business elite class consciousness” in Britain (Davis 2017, 240). And Fred Block, also talks of “a class-conscious capitalist class”, which he finds to be particularly evident among ruling politicians and intellectuals, albeit not among most actual members of the capitalist class (Block 1984 [1977], 33-34; Toscano and Woodcock 2015, 521).

We can understand the beliefs and desires I am making central to

⁵¹ One important exception to this is that it is arguably possible for some collective intentional agents (such as political parties, social movements, and trade unions) to have what List calls “corporate” attitudes or beliefs. For this to be a live possibility, however, the group in question must meet certain fairly demanding conditions, such as exhibiting a process of collective reflection or deliberation and having a formal and agreed-upon process whereby beliefs can come to be “adopted” by the group in a binding way. As List notes, “[w]hether or not a given collective qualifies as a group agent depends on how it is organized: its organizational structure and decision-making procedures. Only sufficiently structured collectives are candidates for group agency”, and thus group belief (List 2014, 1616).

my account of class consciousness as sets of “propositional attitudes”, that is, as the kinds of mental states that involve an agent taking a certain psychological stance towards a claim or statement of some kind (Lindeman 2022; Oppy 1998; Schroeder 2006). For example, for an agent to hold a *belief* usually involves that agent possessing an attitude (or taking a stance) about how things *are* in the world or *what is the case* (Schwitzgebel 2011, 14). We can call the exact nature of the claim or statement about how things are the “propositional content” of the belief: for instance, an agent might possess the attitude (or take the stance) that *the sky is blue*, that *clouds are white*, and so on.⁵²

For an agent to hold a desire, by contrast, involves that agent possessing an attitude (or taking a stance) about what they think the world *should* be like or what would be good or appealing if it were the case. A desire can have the exact same propositional content as a belief (as in when I desire, during the night, that the sun rise and *the sky be blue*), but it may also concern a different claim or statement, as in when I desire, for some reason, *the sky to be green*, or *clouds to be black*.

The crucial difference between beliefs and desires as propositional attitudes is that they have different “directions of fit”: beliefs involve one’s mind attempting to align with or conform to how

⁵² One - perhaps more oft-used - synonym for consciousness is *awareness*. But making this central to our definition has the potentially unfortunate connotation of limiting the possession of class consciousness to the possession of *truth-tracking* beliefs (it would be odd to talk of being aware of something that isn’t actually the case). Rather, it seems wise to not distinguish between accurate and inaccurate kinds of class consciousness at the conceptual level (Wright 1985, 246).

the world in fact is (or is perceived by the agent to be) (Lindeman 2022; Oppy 1998; Schroeder 2006). Desires, on the other hand, involve envisioning the world in some way which aligns with or conforms to how the mind is (or is perceived by the agent to be), but which is currently “an *unactualized possibility*” rather than a state of affairs which accurately represents or captures how the world in fact is (O’Brien 2015, 102, emphasis added).

Beliefs and desires can be mostly unreflective and rooted in affects and instincts that one cannot fully articulate, or they can be much more cognitive, with the holder able to offer sophisticated justifications as a result of internal deliberation about the status of the propositions. Most fall somewhere between these two extremes, possessing both cognitive and affective elements. But the beliefs and desires clearly have to be accessible to conscious awareness to some degree: the agent has to at least be aware that they have them, even if they might not be able to sufficiently explain *why* they hold them.

Thus, part of what it is to have class consciousness, on my account, is when an agent possesses *a certain complex of beliefs and desires about power hierarchies in economic production*.⁵³ But I think we also ought to be somewhat more selective than this. These beliefs and

⁵³ As noted above, other conceptions of economic class in some ways very different from the one I have endorsed here are certainly available. These differing conceptions of class will of course give rise to their own different concepts of class consciousness. My claim is only that the right kinds of concepts and conceptions for the specific question of egalitarian transition are the ones I endorse here: other situations and other problems may make other concepts and conceptions more appropriate.

desires must also be of a specific *type*: they must be *robustly action-guiding* beliefs and desires for the agent to really count as class conscious.

What does it mean for a series of propositional attitudes to guide one's action? Many kinds of beliefs and desires don't "stick" or "take hold in one's psychology" sufficiently to move us to action, as Townsend (2020, 136) has put it. But the specific combination of desires and beliefs central to class consciousness ought to influence the specific concrete intentions that an agent forms if they are to truly be considered a class conscious one.⁵⁴ The beliefs and desires central to class consciousness need to be influential, in other words, in the agent's internal deliberations about how to act, decisively influencing their intentions (Wright 1985, 252).

⁵⁴ My concept of class consciousness is committed to a version of what philosophers of action call "the causal theory" (Stout 2005, 59ff), "causalism" (Mele 2005), or "the standard theory" (Paul 2021, 50; Schlosser 2019) of intentional agency, in which an agent's internal psychological states (such as their having certain desires and beliefs) are viewed as the primary cause that leads to them initiating performance of a given action. Clearly, I lack the space required to do justice to the myriad debates taking place within the philosophy of action and the philosophy of mind here, but it is worth pointing out that this seems to be a relatively uncontroversial position to subscribe to: the surveys cited above frequently refer to this theory being the dominant position within the agency debates. For the classic statement of the causal view, see Davidson (1963). For Davidson, the intention to perform an action is made up solely of a complex of beliefs and desires (or "pro-attitudes"), whereas, according to Markus Schlosser's (2019) recent *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* entry on agency, "it is now widely thought that intentions cannot be reduced to desires and beliefs (and combinations thereof)" and that intentions remain a distinctive psychological state. See Bratman (1987) for one important version of this argument. My thanks to Lea Ypi for introducing me to these debates.

The intuitive idea here is that a class-conscious agent cannot possess a belief about, say, the undesirability of the position they hold in the class structure, but then not let this sometimes guide at least *some* of their decisions, such as, for instance, their decision as to whether or not to sign a petition against the minimum wage, whether to talk to their union rep or avoid them, or whether to applaud or heckle a given piece of political rhetoric. If the belief lacked this action-guiding quality in at least certain paradigmatic situations, it would be very hard to really state that class consciousness was in existence at all.

One kind of action-guiding propositional attitude is what we might term a *fragile* action-guiding propositional attitude. Here, for instance, an agent might *just happen*, because of a range of contingent factors, to come to believe that something about the class structure is the case and that this warrants action of some sort, but this view is highly liable to change when these contingencies are no longer in place. We might imagine an individual overhearing some compelling piece of rhetoric on the radio whilst driving, for example, or engaging in a drunken conversation with a friend or family member, that momentarily causes them to hold the belief that their class position negatively impacts them in some important way, and in this moment, applying to be a member of a political party, or calling into the radio station to express their agreement.

To really be said to possess class consciousness, however, agents arguably need much more than just fragile action-guiding propositional attitudes of this sort: they need *robustly* action-guiding ones. When

something is robust, rather than fragile, it is resilient and liable to survive a variety of changes to present contingencies (such as the radio program ending, or the agent sobering up). Unlike a fragile action-guiding propositional attitude, then, a robustly action-guiding one will endure - as Philip Pettit describes it - "not just in actual circumstances, but in a range of merely possible scenarios." (Pettit 2015, 258).

For a propositional attitude to be robustly action-guiding is to say that it can survive predictable changes in both external stimuli and internal psychology. Most people would probably accept that it is not necessary for an agent's class conscious propositional attitudes to remain action-guiding during a deep bout of mental illness to count as possessing sufficiently robust. It is not then, as if an agent only counts as class conscious if their action-guiding beliefs about the class structure are literally unshakeable. But the propositional attitudes should arguably nonetheless be able to survive certain normal and predictable fluctuations in mood to count as robust. They need to be sufficiently robust, in other words, so that a *wide range* of contexts that the agent will likely find themselves in will cause their beliefs and desires about power hierarchies in economic production to become action-guiding ones.

Note that "robustly action-guiding" is certainly not the same as "*perpetually* action-guiding." An agent's class conscious propositional attitudes need not *incessantly* be decisive in all of their internal deliberations about how to act in all possible situations they find themselves in. One can possess a robustly action-guiding belief

concerning the immorality of eating animal products which influences one's intentions across a wide range of relevant circumstances, for instance, but which nonetheless is not *constantly* exerting influence on how one acts at all times. In many situations, where it is deemed not relevant, it can remain only a "standing" or "offline" belief (Lindeman 2022). What makes a set of propositional attitudes robustly action-guiding is that they become "occurrent" or influential *when appropriate or relevant circumstances obtain*. It is only when what Miller has called appropriate "stimulus events" take place that this attitude will come to the forefront of my mind and become action-guiding (Miller 2013, 5-7; Miller 2014, 20).

The appropriate realm in which we would expect class conscious beliefs to be robustly action-guiding is that of at least *some forms* of political decision making: whether to approve of, participate in, or help organise a political party's election campaign, a trade union strike action, or a social movement protest march, and which political figures to admire, what kinds of political content to read, what political issues one finds particularly important or salient, and so on.

2.5 Transformative egalitarian class consciousness

The concept of class consciousness then, on my account, refers to possession by a human agent of a series of robustly action-guiding beliefs and desires about hierarchies in economic production. A useful

way to think about the different specific *conceptions* of class consciousness derivable from this broad concept, concerns the differing propositional content of these attitudes: the precise *set* of beliefs and desires involved. In this section I want to delineate the complex central to my own favoured conception of class consciousness, and contrast this with several other conceptions that one might construct. To possess transformative egalitarian (or ^(TE)) class consciousness, on my account, a human agent must possess the following attitudes (or take the following stances):

(1) That it is the case that a capitalist, middle and working class exist within the power hierarchy of economic production and that one

belongs to one of these groups (*class belonging belief*)

(2) That it is the case that the divergent power possibility spaces

possessed by the members of the different groups posited in (1) is unacceptably, unjustifiably, or immorally unequal (*class inequality belief*)

(3) That it would be appealing if the unfair divisions of power between

the groups posited in (2) were radically curtailed in the future

(*curtailing inequality desire*)

(4) That it is the case that the most appropriate means for reaching the

appealing state of affairs described in (3) centrally includes large-scale

collective action on the basis of the working class (*collective working class action belief*)

Let me briefly expand on each of these. The first of these beliefs is hopefully fairly self-explanatory. Part of what it is to hold ^(TE) class consciousness is to believe that three distinct groups along the lines sketched in the previous sections can be said to exist within the society in which the agent resides. What is also important is not just that an agent believes that they exist, but also that they hold that they *belong to* one of these existing groups. An agent has to see themselves as part of a larger economic grouping to be considered class conscious. Sometimes, activists and intellectuals interested in building the political power of the working class write as if there is a choice between a sectarian and fractured “identity politics” (presumed to attach to one’s perception of belonging to a gender-, race- or sexuality- based group), and a non-identitarian “class politics”, but of course, identifying as belonging to a particular economic class is itself a kind of identity politics.⁵⁵

Class consciousness is a phrase often used in the media and the public sphere to mean the singular possession of a class belonging belief (that one believes one is among the “have-nots” rather than the

⁵⁵ For more on the claim that individual political decision-making and action is always at least partly a result of a particular sense the individual has of who they are, and in particular how they relate to the many other agents in the political realm, see Brown-Dean (2019, 228), Lacombe (2021, 20) and Mason and Wronski (2018, 258), each of whom have recently usefully claimed that almost all politics should be considered “identity politics.”

“haves”). Class consciousness is often attributed to - say - Occupy Wall Street protestors or others opposing rising economic inequality on this basis (Bouie 2020; Klein 2008). But as Bertell Ollman notes, this everyday use appears to be an instance of treating “the various psychological mediations united in class consciousness [...] as one” (Ollman 1972, 7; cf. Keefer, Goode and Van Berkel 2015; Mann 1973). Once we peer beneath the surface, it usually only makes sense to talk of a belief that one is among the “have-nots” rather than the “haves”, if one *also* possesses a network of other beliefs and desires.

So, on my favoured conception, alongside this class belonging belief, a human agent must also believe that it is the case that the inequalities in power possibility spaces which presently distinguish members of the capitalist, middle, and working class from one another *are undesirable or unfair in some way*: that it is unfair that power-consequences take the shape they currently do. There are a great many specific ways this egalitarian belief can be grounded. For instance, an agent might believe this because they hold that class differences make it impossible for there to be equal prospects to achieve human flourishing, or, more minimally, equal prospects to meet one’s basic needs or fundamental human interests (e.g., Fabre 2000, 15ff). It might also be because these class differences are believed to make it impossible for there to be an equal distribution of coercive work obligations (Gourevitch 2018, 907), equal life prospects for those with broadly similar capacities and inclinations to exercise them (Shelby 2016, 36), or equal experiences of non-hierarchical social relations, or

access to an equal share of society's basic resources, or equal influence over the political process, or all living a life securely free from the threat of domination (Cicerchia 2021). Rawlsians, luck egalitarians, analytical Marxists, relational egalitarians, left-libertarians, civic republicans, human capability theorists – in other words, a range of reasonable political positions grounded in egalitarian moral reasons - all disagree about the most appropriate metric here. But provided one holds a belief that can reasonably be seen as grounded in egalitarian – rather than inegalitarian - moral reasons in one of these ways, this is compatible with this component of the belief complex that makes up transformative egalitarian class consciousness. The important contrast here is with the many kinds of class consciousness we can imagine where an agent has a firm belief that they belong to a class, but actually possesses a *positive normative evaluation* of this state of affairs.

Consider, for instance, the forms of what we can term *neoliberal class consciousness* often possessed by members of the capitalist class. Many wealthy economic elites who engaged in collective political action which aimed to break free of the social democratic compact in the 1970s, for instance, possessed robustly action-guiding beliefs about the undesirable constraints that they faced on their agency as a result of their position in the social-democratic class structure. But the class consciousness of a member of the capitalist class trying to break out of the social democratic compact is not grounded in egalitarian moral reasons, but egoistic ones: it seeks to obtain and secure social advantages for a narrow group of people that are not open to others.

These agents might also believe that existing power hierarchies are beneficial for growth, for economic innovation, or are reflective of individual effort and talent, and so on: none of which is the same as a class inequality belief.

Third, an agent must desire a radical curtailment of the differing power possibility spaces which currently distinguish members of the capitalist, middle, and working classes from one another. This involves possessing some desirable vision for the future of power hierarchies in economic production: the envisioning of a state of affairs in which everyone has a much more similar - a much less unequal - power possibility space than they currently do. In most cases, this desire will probably be at least partly self-regarding: a desire that some change to the class structure take place because there is a sense in which this would have beneficial consequences for one's own agency. But there is no need to incorporate this into the very conception of class consciousness: we might also imagine various kinds of *altruistic* class conscious desires that are concerned not with the consequences (good or bad) for the agent themselves, but rather with those for *other* agents in the class structure.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Of course, a desire to radically curtail the differing power possibility spaces which currently distinguish members of the capitalist, middle, and working class is probably most likely to form a stable and important component of an individual's mental landscape when it is at least *partly* self-regarding, concerning the problematic aspects of one's *own* node-occupation, and not just issues with the class structure in general (think, for instance, of the emergence of "communist class consciousness" among a section of the capitalist class discussed by Marx and Lenin: even here the belief among the elites will generally at least partly include the idea that even the rich cannot truly flourish

Finally, fourth, there is a belief that it is the case that the specific set of means or actions most appropriate for reaching the appealing state of affairs described in (3) centrally includes large-scale collective action on the basis of the working class. This belief does not state that large-scale collective action on the basis of the working class will be sufficient by itself, only that it is central among the set of means appropriate for radically curtailing power differentials between classes.

The most important contrast between this component of ^(TE) class consciousness and other potential conceptions of class consciousness is that not all conceptions make a place for large scale collective action of this sort. There are various kinds of individualistic, “aspirational” forms of class consciousness that an agent might hold, for instance, which include beliefs that one belongs to a class, that the power hierarchies between classes are currently unjustly unequal, and a desire to see this curtailed, but which hold instead a means-end belief that the best way for the agent to respond to all this is simply to try their hardest to escape their own working class node and become middle class or part of the capitalist class. This is the belief that one ought to make one’s own way in the system with one’s head down: working harder, rather than believing collective working class action is part of the answer.

What should hopefully also be clear from this brief description is

under capitalism, that capitalist competition is necessarily alienating even for its beneficiaries, and so on). But this arguably only becomes a live issue when it comes to determining among whom it is most feasible to raise or build class consciousness and I don’t think we should build a condition that the beliefs and desires be self-regarding in at the conceptual stage.

that the distinction between each of these beliefs and desires is drawn a little artificially: they are not in fact entirely distinct from one another but instead form an *interrelated complex*.

Before moving on, I want to briefly note what I consider to be one of the main virtues of the conception of class consciousness I have outlined. This is that it enables us to distinguish fairly clearly between a specific *political ideology* a human agent might possess, on the one hand, and the possession of class consciousness, on the other. On my conception (to put it somewhat crudely) one can be a class-conscious Leninist, but also a class-conscious Anarchist, a class-conscious social democrat or a class-conscious libertarian socialist: these are positions which it strikes me as reasonable conclusions to draw from a range of egalitarian moral norms. In my view, this is the same as how, if we were talking about the complex of beliefs and desires that together constitute feminist “anti-patriarchal” consciousness, we would want our account to be sufficiently capacious to allow, for instance, family abolitionist feminists, political-lesbian feminists, sex positive feminists, and others, to all count as possessing this consciousness in one form or another, despite their many substantive ideological disagreements.

This is something that we would not be able to do with, say, Lukács’s conception of class consciousness. For Lukács, to be class conscious just *is* to accept various aspects of the Marxian worldview – historical materialism, the inevitability of a terminal capitalist crisis, the necessity of revolution, and so on - as true (Miliband 1977, 34-5). To hold to a different conception of class consciousness of any kind would

just be to incorrectly perceive one's "true interests" (Lukács 2014a [1919], 45; Lukács 2014b [1919], 50), and to view social reality in a veiled and misleading way. As Lukács puts it, for the worker to become an orthodox Marxist is for them to follow their immediate grievances under capitalism through to their (presumably only) "logical conclusion" (Lukács 1971c [1920], 52). The set of robust beliefs and desires that Lukács makes central to his account are, for him, the most "appropriate and rational" beliefs for members of the proletariat to possess - they are the beliefs all would have "if they were able to assess" social reality objectively (Lukács 1971c [1920], 52).

The problem with this view, however, is that a necessary presupposition of finding it convincing is sharing Lukács's view that it is possible to access an Archimedean point from which the true nature of social reality can be observed and that, once found, the reality observable from this Archimedean point will more-or-less exactly cohere with the writings of Marx and Lenin. But it seems to me that at least some disagreement with these precepts is not going to just be bad faith false consciousness but is in fact likely to be reasonable disagreement about the correct interpretation of the theoretical consequences that follow from a series of beliefs grounded in egalitarian moral reasons. It is very difficult to make complex judgements in the political and moral realm with the same degree of certainty that we might apply when studying mathematics, or physics, for instance. The worry then, is that Lukács isn't *making* his judgements about true and false class consciousness from an Archimedean point

but is just trying to pass off his cognitive biases, motivated reasoning, and particular factional commitments, as *The Truth About Politics*. My own conception, by contrast, is considerably more accommodating of ideological disagreement.

An obvious downside to my conception, of course, which follows from this, is that - unlike with Lukács's account - it becomes much more difficult to make fine-grained distinctions about the development or maturity of class consciousness among different groups. But I think we just have to bite the bullet here, to avoid the over-restrictiveness I have identified in Lukács's conception. The price of being able to make these fine-grained distinctions is just too high in terms of the intellectual hubris involved. There is also the pragmatic point that because we are seeking an answer to the question of how to radically transform society's economic institutions to achieve greater equality, *not* the question of how to realize a fully communist state, we simply don't need to be as exclusive as Lukács generally is. It is plausible that individuals and groups can contribute to the arrival of a radically fairer and more equal economy without subscribing to every precept of Marxist-Leninist ideology.

2.6 Conclusion

My aim in this chapter was to perform some of the necessary conceptual groundwork to defend my overall claim, that raising class

consciousness ought to form part of the answer to the question of how to realise something like a property-owning democracy, or liberal socialist or social democratic state in the advanced capitalist democracies. I described both the broad *concepts* and the specific *conceptions* of class and class consciousness that I will be deploying throughout the thesis. I defined a class as a group of individuals that share positions within a social structure. I then claimed that, despite widespread concerns about economic class being an outdated term, it is still possible to identify a capitalist, middle and working class in the advanced capitalist democracies based on the amounts of economic power different individuals within the social structure of production possess and described the rough contours of these three groups.

I then defined economic class consciousness as a complex of robustly action-guiding beliefs and desires about these power hierarchies in economic production. Finally, I distinguished my own favoured *conception* of class consciousness - what I called transformative egalitarian class consciousness - from other available conceptions based on the specific beliefs and desires that constitute this complex. Central to transformative egalitarian class consciousness, I claimed, is: a class belonging belief, a class inequality belief, a curtailing inequality desire and a collective working class action belief.

3

**Raised Class Consciousness as a
Feasibility-enhancing Outcome**

With the conceptual groundwork I undertook in chapter two now completed, it is time to turn to the construction of the first two stages of our transitional theory, identifying both (1) a significant feasibility constraint on the achievement of our ultimate transitional goal (the capitalist class) and (2) a feasibility-enhancing outcome that would significantly increase the chances of achieving the ultimate transitional goal by lessening this constraint (raising ^(TE) class consciousness).

I begin with an account of the feasibility of instituting a turbo-charged social democracy, property-owning democracy or liberal market socialist regime under present political circumstances. I then draw on both historical and contemporary empirical evidence to claim that members of the capitalist class are very likely to resist this institutionalisation and thus represent a significant “soft constraint” on the achievement of egalitarian economic justice.

I then move on to argue that raising ^(TE) class consciousness is an outcome which would enhance the feasibility of achieving the ultimate transitional goal by lessening the constraint posed by the capitalist class. This relates to the useful *heuristic* role that I claim ^(TE) class consciousness can play: citizens armed with this type of consciousness are more capable of emerging victorious in the class struggle against

the beneficiaries of economic injustice that inevitably must be waged if egalitarian economic transformations are to be sustainably implemented. I note that it will not be possible to raise this consciousness among all citizens, but I claim that there is a substantial possible coalition of citizens - what I term the "egalitarian constituency" (comprised of existing supporters of egalitarian economic change and many others who can plausibly come to be so supportive) - among whom this consciousness-raising could take place.

The chapter also features an extended discussion of the idea of "class reductionism" and demonstrates how the arguments I make in the thesis can make class central without lapsing into reductive claims. It then concludes by looking ahead to the remaining chapters and describing the outlines of the three-stage model of consciousness-raising developed in greater depth in the rest of the thesis.

3.1 The feasibility of achieving egalitarian economic justice

Knowing how feasible a given political outcome is in some set of social circumstances generally involves getting clear on the following four points:

(1) What "temporal period" we are discussing the feasibility of this outcome with reference to (Lawford-Smith 2013, 250).

(2) What (if any) individual or collective agents exist within this

temporal period with the ability to act in a way that has “a positive probability of (stably) bringing about” (or producing) the outcome (Lawford-Smith 2013, 253; Wiens 2015, 452).

(3) What features (if any) constrain or impede the agent’s exercise of this ability within this temporal period, and in what way(s) they do so (Gilabert and Lawford-Smith 2012, 815; Lawford-Smith 2013, 258).

And (4) to what extent (if at all) it is possible for these impeding features to come to be sufficiently less constraining during the temporal period such that the agent can come to exercise their ability and thereby stably bring about the outcome in question (Gilabert and Lawford-Smith 2012, 814; Lawford-Smith 2013, 255).

Most obviously, identifying (1), the relevant temporal period, is a prerequisite of any answer because, as Gilabert and Lawford-Smith have pointed out, “[w]e will get different answers” to the question of whether some outcome is feasible in a given set of social circumstances “depending on whether we mean” *feasible right now*, in the immediate present, or rather feasible “in the next twenty years” (Gilabert and Lawford-Smith 2012, 815). Any answer to the question of feasibility requires an account of the precise timeframe assumed, whether implicitly or explicitly, by the question.

Identifying (2), the agents existing within the temporal period with the ability to act in a way that has a positive probability - that is, a

probability that is greater than zero⁵⁷ - of bringing about the political outcome (causing it to come to pass), is also important because, in general at least, it is *agents* that determine the chances of political outcomes coming about. Admittedly, there will sometimes be political outcomes that can come to pass simply because of agents just *omitting* to do something, or because of the activity of some *non-human* agent. But in most discussions of political feasibility, individual or collective agents are usually required to bring about the various possible states of affairs (Gilabert and Lawford-Smith 2012, 815; Lawford-Smith 2013, 247).

Importantly, the kind of ability we should be interested in these agents exercising is both “synchronic ability” and “diachronic ability” (Lawford-Smith 2013, 249). Sometimes, we can state that no agent in the relevant set of social circumstances and within the stipulated temporal period could *ever* possess the ability to bring about the outcome, because to do so would “violate hard constraints” like absolute biological limits on human agency (Gilabert and Lawford-Smith 2012, 815; Lawford-Smith 2013, 251). But at other times, we can state that whilst no agent *currently* has such an ability, they could *develop* this ability at a later point within the temporal period: that

⁵⁷ Stemplowska makes the important point that we should recognise that “some element of luck is compatible with an action being feasible [...] we think it is feasible to make a phonecall, even though one’s phone could give up, and we think it is feasible to drive to a shop even though one could be in an accident” (Stemplowska 2016, 289). This is why it would be too demanding to insist that the agent have complete or near-complete control over an outcome coming to pass for it to count as feasible.

there is, in other words a dynamic path or route to the agent possessing the ability, as a result of their present abilities.⁵⁸

Additionally, the use of the word “stably” in (2) is also an important feature of our account because, as Gilabert and Lawford-Smith put it, “getting ‘there’, if we stay there for only a short while, does not really look like a case of ‘getting there’ at all” (Gilabert and Lawford-Smith 2012, 813). What matters to our search is thus abilities that can get us to the relevant political outcome in a way that is likely to endure and persist over time.

As for (3) - the features within the social circumstances that constrain the agent’s ability - in general, there seems to be two main ways in which a feature could constrain or be hostile to an agent’s exercise of their ability. On the one hand, some feature could simply *prevent* the agent from ever exercising their ability in the first place and, on the other, a feature could *disrupt* (or interfere with) the agent’s exercise of their ability in such a way that it negatively impacts the probability of this ability stably bringing about the outcome.

I construe the possible constraining features deliberately broadly here. We can usefully distinguish, with David Wiens, between constraints “intrinsic” or *internal* to the agent specified in (2), and *external* constraints that originate in “features of an agent’s environment” (Wiens 2015, 453). In the former camp are things like: *physical ability constraints* (including constraints on human strength

⁵⁸ Gilabert utilizes a similar distinction but prefers the terms “immediate” and “dynamic” ability (Gilabert 2017, 119).

and speed and the length of time human agents can stay awake and go without food), *cognitive ability constraints* (including constraints on what human agents can come to know, understand and remember), *motivational constraints* (including a lack of desire to form the intention to exercise the ability, or a deep-seated fear of the consequences of exercising the ability).

And in the latter camp of external constraints are: *natural environment constraints* (including fluctuations in season and weather, and the limited number of hours of daylight every day), *economic constraints* (including relative scarcity, and the currently available means for distributing goods and organising economic production), *cultural constraints* (including what kinds of behaviour is considered thinkable, normal and appropriate), *technological constraints* (including limits to computer processing power) and *legal and institutional constraints* (which set limits on what moves are realistically open to an agent, without them incurring unacceptable sanctions) and, finally, *other agent constraints* (in which different collective or individual agents interfere with the relevant agent under discussion to prevent them exercising their ability) (Southwood and Goodin 2020, 971).

Turning finally to (4) - whether it is possible to make these constraining features less constraining - I construe "less constraining" to encompass both the absolute *removal* of the constraint, and also just making things such that the agent is marginally more able to exercise their ability. And I also do not specify the agency involved in altering the constraints. Perhaps it will be the same agent that can bring about

the political outcome in question, but perhaps it will also be some other human agent, or indeed some spontaneous natural occurrence that causes this to be so. This is why it is part of stage (3) that we understand not just *what* features are constraining, but also *how* they are: we need a sense of the causal pathways by which they act to prevent the agent's exercise of their ability, so that we can see how possible it is for things to unfold differently. Of course, it won't always be possible to make every kind of constraint less constraining – for instance, if an agent is “robustly disposed not to try” to exercise their ability and produce the relevant outcome, then there is probably little that can be done to lessen this constraint (Southwood and Goodin 2020, 969). But in other circumstances, perhaps by changing the incentive-structure the agent faces, we will often be able to lessen motivational constraints (Stempłowska 2016, 291). We can thus state that a given political event possesses the quality of being “feasibility-enhancing”, with respect to the outcome in question, when it makes these constraining features just listed less of an impediment to the agent.

Let us state, then, that a given political outcome is feasible over the course of some temporal period when: *we can identify an agent with the ability to bring about the outcome, and there are very few constraining features significantly impeding their exercise of this ability (or these features can come to be sufficiently less constraining relatively easily over the course of the temporal period)*. The more constraining features that we can identify, and the less modifiable these appear to be over the course of the relevant timeframe, the harder it is to make a

convincing case that the given political outcome is in fact a feasible one.

Note that we can envision many fairly feasible outcomes on this account that are nonetheless still pretty *unlikely* to come to pass. This will occur when there are only a few relatively soft constraints on an agent bringing about a given outcome, which certainly *could* be easily overcome during the relevant timeframe, but we would nonetheless be *surprised* if they were in fact overcome. There will be feasible outcomes, in other words, that do not compute with our settled expectations of what “usually” tends to occur or what is “apt” to happen. But we want our account of feasibility to capture such possibilities, because otherwise our account just collapses into one of *likelihood*, a related but nonetheless distinct concept (Lawford-Smith 2013, 256; Stemplowska 2021, 2387).

Note also that an outcome might be highly infeasible on this definition (with a huge number of highly constraining features, perhaps, preventing some agent from achieving an outcome) but still nonetheless come to pass. This is because our account of feasibility also does not intend to capture all *possible* outcomes. The history of human civilisation is filled with examples of deeply strange, chance events which come about “against all the odds.” But we want an account of feasible outcomes to exclude such “fluky” or “freaky occurrences”, so as to avoid overstating the prospects for such unexpected occurrences coming to pass (Stemplowska 2021, 2387; Southwood and Wiens 2016).

What then, might be the feasibility (as opposed to the mere

likelihood or simple possibility) of the outcome of the institutionalisation of a property-owning democracy, market socialist regime, or turbo-charged social democracy in the social circumstances of the advanced capitalist democracies, over the timeframe of, say, the next 50 years? To begin to examine this question, let us state that, in a liberal democracy, it is almost certainly a *national electoral force of some kind* that stands the best chance of taking control of the levers of the state and playing a much more proactive role in the functioning of the economy by changing laws and regulations around property ownership, market exchange and taxation. The collective agency that, over the next 50 years in the advanced capitalist democracies, has the ability to implement radical egalitarian social change, thus appears to be: a political party committed to and capable of winning an election (or, more likely - given the scale of transformation required - a series of elections) and implementing the relevant changes.

This is because, as Dryzek notes, it is political parties that are often the collective agents best-positioned to “influence primary agents of justice such as the state”, partly through exerting pressure on other political parties, but primarily through *coming to occupy the state itself* (Dryzek 2015, 381). The basic idea here is that, assuming you live in a country where the locus of political power remains with the centralised state, then national political parties are often the most appropriate agents for coming to manoeuvre the levers of power in a society such that it more closely approximates a given set of principles of egalitarian justice.

Inspired by White and Ypi's (2016, 21-26) influential work, we can state that there are three crucial conditions that typically need to be met for a national political party to be said to exist.⁵⁹ First, there must be several individuals that share a series of broad political aims. Second, these individuals must together be involved in a formal association of some kind. And finally, this association must make regular efforts to control or maintain control of existing state-level political decision-making institutions to advance these shared aims.

The first condition insists that several individuals exist who are united by a series of broad political aims, rather than by (for instance) common hair colour or a common desire to play football. White and Ypi state that these broad political aims should amount to a relatively all-encompassing "interpretation of how power should be exercised" in society (White and Ypi 2016, 21). The type of national political party that needs to exist for the kinds of social and economic changes advocated by contemporary egalitarians to come about is obviously one where its aims centrally include the institution of a turbo-charged social democracy, property-owning democracy, or liberal socialist regime.

This interpretation of how political power in general should be exercised need not be completely rigid and uniformly shared: every political party tends to exhibit at least a degree of transformation in its aims over time, as well as a fairly large amount of internal

⁵⁹ Abstract definitions of this sort are - of course - unlikely to capture everything in our messy political reality. But establishing an "ideal type" of this sort nonetheless helps to fix ideas (White and Ypi 2016, 24).

disagreement. But the basic idea is that the individuals that together make up a party typically need to share at least the central components of a series of broad aims to constitute a collective of the right kind.

The second condition insists that these individuals not only share political aims but also be collectively involved in a formal association with one another. As White and Ypi note, this usually means that there are a set of documents created by the group that set down “a system of rules” of some kind (White and Ypi 2016, 104). These rules typically set out the procedures determining how the like-minded individuals that make up the party can attain and lose the various roles or offices within the party (such as leader, electoral candidate, or spokesperson), and what powers and responsibilities are attached to these offices, as well as general guidelines about how the various kinds of work the party is required to undertake ought to be divided and conducted.

It is the relatively formal nature of the association that helps to differentiate a political party from instances where several politically like-minded individuals just happen to be momentarily gathered on the top deck of a bus, or at a protest march, for instance. The formal nature of the association also helps to “anchor the partisan association cross-temporally” (White and Ypi 2016, 215), increasing the chances that the group endures over time. Of course, party members may associate with one another on the basis of a deeply hierarchical or a directly democratic set of rules and procedures, so this condition does not prejudge the specific questions of party organisation and

professionalisation. Rather, it merely states that the association must be organised by a formal set of rules of some kind.

The final condition insists that this relatively formalised association of individuals with shared political aims regularly acts to further its goals in a specific set of ways: members of national political parties must make attempts to gain or maintain control of national-level political decision-making institutions. This involves an attempt to gain or maintain control of what White and Ypi call the “executive body able to make authoritative demands” over the entire territory of a nation and usually through contesting elections of some kind (White and Ypi 2016, 187-189).

There seems to be good reasons, then, to hold that it is a formal association of individuals within an advanced capitalist democracy that shares a series of broad transformative egalitarian political aims, and that makes regular efforts to control and maintain control of existing state-level political decision-making institutions - typically through elections - that is the agent probably best-placed to act in a way that has a positive probability of (stably) bringing about the outcome of radical egalitarian transformation over the next 50 years.

In my view, in none of the advanced capitalist democracies, is there a national electoral political party with the *synchronic* or immediate ability to win a national election (or series of elections) and implement transformative egalitarian changes in anything like the immediate future: there are simply too many features constraining these outcomes for them to be immediately feasible. In some countries,

perhaps, there is an existing national electoral political party that could feasibly come to gain the *diachronic* ability over the next 50 years (it could come to adopt radical egalitarian changes in its electoral manifesto, for instance, and garner greater electoral support than it currently has). In other countries, by contrast, we might imagine collectives of egalitarian-minded individuals (currently not organised into such a party) who might, together, gain this diachronic ability by coming to form such a party over the relevant timeframe.

Although there are clearly *many* features which currently constrain the ability of such a collective electoral force of this kind to successfully bring about radical egalitarian social changes of this sort, the claim I wish to defend in the next section is that *among the very most significant* constraining features is the impediment posed by the capitalist class. The institutionalisation of these social changes certainly doesn't seem to be constrained by limits to human strength and speed, or what human agents can come to know, understand and remember, or fluctuations in season and weather, and the limited number of hours of daylight every day, or *technological constraints* of various kinds, for instance. Rather, one of the absolutely central primary constraints seems to come in the form of an *other agent constraint*, in which a different collective agent looks set to prevent the electoral party committed to instituting transformative egalitarian social change from exercising its ability.

3.2 The capitalist class as adversaries of social justice

My claim is that members of this capitalist class would, in all likelihood, view attempts to implement turbo-charged social democracy, property-owning democracy, or liberal socialism as an assault on the current scope of the power possibility space their class position affords them, and use at least some combination of the various powers they possess in an attempt to safeguard their current advantages and thus prevent the realisation of these egalitarian social changes. To see this, we need to recognise how some of the key aims of egalitarian theories of economic justice *necessitate curtailing the power possibility space of this group*. Consider, for example, the following - I hope fairly uncontentious – list of five points of substantive overlap between proponents of property-owning democracy, liberal socialism, and turbo-charged social democracy.⁶⁰ Advocates of a radically more egalitarian economy are usually committed to each of the following:

- (1) Roughly equal opportunities to exercise influence over the political process are seen as a *sine qua non* of a just society, usually for reasons

⁶⁰ Each component of the list should be recognisable to anyone familiar with the literature on economic justice cited in my introduction. But see in particular the discussion in Edmundson (2021, chapters four and six), Gilabert and O'Neill (2019, section three); von Platz (2020, 10-11) and Robeyns's (2017) "democratic argument."

of securing the self-respect of each individual. Thus, each calls for *the elimination of the political privileges currently available to the wealthiest* (such as their overt and covert influence through lobbying and party funding).

(2) Everyone should be able to access the basic necessities for a minimally decent life. Thus, each egalitarian scheme calls for *the extension of the generosity and scope of the currently very patchy welfare provision* available in the advanced capitalist democracies.

(3) To fund these basic necessities, as well as to ensure these roughly equal opportunities for political influence, each of these schemes also calls for *radical redistributions of national wealth through measures like inheritance and wealth taxation and reduced capital mobility*.

(4) Opportunities for paid work are seen by all advocates of these schemes as an important component of wellbeing. Thus, each also calls for *the elimination of nonvoluntary unemployment*.

(5) This paid work must be not only available, but also relatively meaningful, rather than alienating. Thus, each calls for *reducing opportunities for domination in the workplace, and increasing workplace protections, rights to join unions, and the influence of workers over the productive process*.

None of these changes can come to pass, in my view, without radically transforming the current nature of the power hierarchies in economic production discussed in the previous chapter. I stated that the capitalist class currently exercise an important kind of economic power over elected representatives, for instance, which is clearly incompatible with roughly equal opportunities for all to exercise influence over the political process. I also stated that the capitalist class currently exercise a further important kind of economic power over their employees, and that one crucial way they exercise this power is through the coercive threat of unemployment. Clearly, granting everyone access to the basic necessities for a minimally decent life and eliminating nonvoluntary unemployment removes the credibility of this important threatening tool currently at the hands of the capitalist class.

Another way in which the capitalist class currently exercise a kind of economic power over their employees is through the ability to issue commands that are obeyed by workers as a matter of course. Increasing the influence of workers over the productive process and increasing workplace protections would clearly curtail the scope capitalists currently enjoy to command their employees as they see fit. Finally, I also stated that the capitalist class currently exercise a kind of economic power to, including the ability to effect or bring about a whole range of states of affairs with the productive property which they control, and the ability in particular to effect a state of affairs in which they cease to engage in wage labour of any kind. Radical redistributions of their wealth and income, and restrictions on capital mobility, clearly

also restrict or even eliminate these powers.

Perhaps, if members of the capitalist class were a mere “aggregative” group (a mere “bundle” or “collection” of individuals grouped on the basis of a shared property or situation of some kind), they would be unable to successfully coordinate the kinds of action necessary to resist and prevent the restriction of their power possibility spaces in these ways. But there is plentiful evidence from the social sciences that the capitalist class, or at least a good proportion of its members, are better thought of as forming a series of what Tollefsen calls “*corporate*” groups (Tollefsen 2015, 47).⁶¹ That is, many members of the capitalist class currently have organised decision-making processes of various kinds and are thus able to coordinate complex forms of collective action by taking individual (often conflicting) preferences and transforming them into *collective* stances and intentions (Collins 2019, 11).⁶²

⁶¹ In *The Poverty of Philosophy*, Marx famously distinguishes between - on the one hand - “a class as against capital” (which merely shares “a common situation”) and “a class for itself”, on the other, that is capable of coordinating collectively to defend its interests (Marx 2000 [1847], 231). But Tollefsen does not mention this important historical precedent for her own distinction. Stephanie Collins also draws a broadly similar distinction between what she calls mere “combinations” of individuals on the one hand and fully-fledged “collectives” (where several agents “are united under a rationally operated group-level decision-making procedure”) on the other (Collins 2019, 11; 20).

⁶² We certainly do not need to claim that there is anything like complete unity of interests among the capitalist class to claim that they can sometimes effectively act collectively. There is plentiful evidence, for instance, that achieving unity of interests among the corporate elite is a fraught process, and that division and lack of coordination are as common an outcome as goal-oriented collective action (Mizruchi 2013). Mintz (1989, 212) helpfully mentions two main areas of potential disagreement among members of this class. First, there will frequently

These decision-making processes currently extend over company “directorates, business associations, [and] pressure groups” (Bottomore 1989, 11). Because of the scale of capitalist firms in the modern economy, many are now comprised of multiple capitalist shareholders who collectively direct the firm. And well-known business associations include the Bilderberg Group and the Mont Pelerin Society. Well-known pressure groups include NGOs like the Trilateral Commission, the International Chamber of Commerce, and the European Round Table of Industrialists. There are also think tanks like the Institute for Economic Affairs (IEA), the American Enterprise Institute, and the Committee for Economic Development of The Conference Board (CED) (Carroll and Sapinski 2010, 505-507).

These capitalist collective agencies consist of what Tuomela calls both non-operative and “operative members” (Tuomela 2005, 346) Operative members agree upon or set a *collective* intention through a group decision-making procedure of some kind, believe that this intended group action is possible, intend to make a personal contribution to this group action, and believe that other operative members also believe and intend in these ways (Tuomela 2005, cf.

be conflicts between capitalists who own different kinds of capital goods, with some capitalists favouring a more protectionist, interventionist government, for instance, and others favouring a more laissez faire, free trade style of government. Second, there will also be conflicts over the most appropriate strategy for profit-maximization, with different capitalists taking different approaches on the basis of different priorities, outlooks and temperaments. The role of capitalist collective agencies is to overcome these sources of disagreement in ways that aid collective interests.

Bratman 2014). Operative members of these groups can thus be considered what is sometimes called the “inner circle” (Useem 1979; 1984), “leading edge”, or “militant minority” among the capitalist class. Non-operative members simply go along with or do not obstruct this process.

But even among non-operative members of capitalist collective agents (who tend instead to just free-ride on the efforts of this inner circle, or contribute to collective action only sporadically) (Murray 2014), there is still a great deal of social interaction. This is sustained “through family connections, associations deriving from a distinctive educational experience”, and, we might add, also through social clubs and regular participation in exclusive recreational activities and sports (Bottomore 1989, 11; Leys 2013, 116; Mintz 1989, 207). All these collective activities would radically smooth the process of incorporation of non-operative members of the capitalist class into collective actors if they were to feel their power possibility space was sufficiently under threat. They do this by generating and maintaining the kinds of social cohesion and trust which are crucial preconditions for eventual participation in collective class action (Domhoff 2022, 82).

In my view, we can be relatively confident that many members of the capitalist class will use the power and influence that their roles in these forms of collective organisation grant them (or could grant them if they became more active) to attempt to prevent the implementation

of radically egalitarian social change.⁶³ There are two main sources of evidence for what Gourevitch calls the “basic sociological fact” that “[t]he powerful do not voluntarily give up their power” (Gourevitch 2020, 113), both of which I will now briefly summarise.⁶⁴

The first is based on polling and other data about the *current* political preferences and attitudes of members of this class. There is evidence from social psychology that the most economically privileged strata of society literally find it more difficult to empathize with others than the less economically fortunate (Kraus, Côté and Keltner 2010).

As Elizabeth Anderson notes, “Power [often] makes people morally blind. It stunts their moral imaginations and corrupts their moral reasoning” (Anderson 2016, 93). One potential explanation for this is that individuals have a bias against recognising facts that call into question their self-conception as morally good people, and as belonging to a morally good group (Jost, Banaji and Nosek 2004). Additionally, the psychological toll of being opposed to or alienated from the social system one inhabits can be overwhelming. Whilst everyone is likely to be subject to this bias to some extent, those that are both materially and

⁶³ Additionally, it seems plausible that members of this class will not just *resist* attempts by a party agency to implement something like a property-owning democracy, but will also be actively engaged in trying to shape their societies and their economies in such a way that makes the realisation of something like this institutional scheme *even less feasible*.

⁶⁴ This “basic sociological fact” was clearly not lost on Rawls. He writes in *A Theory of Justice* that “[t]he beneficiaries of clearly unjust institutions [...] may find it hard to reconcile themselves to the changes that will have to be made” (1999a, 154) and that “given men’s estimate of their position, they act effectively to preserve it” (1999a, 103). See also Goodhart (2018, 181) and Wolff (2019, 16).

symbolically best rewarded under the present situation are highly likely to be subject to this psychological tendency. The high mental toll of remaining opposed to and in conflict with the basic structural functioning of society means that many individuals tend to reconcile themselves with the world broadly as it is, assuming there is some reason or logic to the way political and economic developments unfold (Hafer and Sutton 2016).⁶⁵

Additionally, as Gourevitch and Stanczyk (2018, 11) conclude after an extensive survey of polling evidence in the US context, the capitalist class “already oppose even modest forms of downward redistribution.” This observation holds true across a vast array of issues members of this class have been polled upon, such as raising the minimum wage, increasing benefits for the poorest and state initiatives to stem the rise of unemployment. Will Atkinson, in his own survey of class attitudes in Britain and Europe, finds the same, noting a “consistent correspondence between higher capital holdings, [and] an economically liberal ethos” (Atkinson 2020, 155; Atkinson 2017, 70). In general, members of the capitalist class have very strong desires to preserve their myriad privileges in the workplace and the political realm and prevent the redistribution of their wealth and the eradication of unemployment (being able to draw from - or discard back into - a

⁶⁵ The fact that - in Britain at least - even very privileged people, such as those who went to private (fee-paying) schools or work in high-paying professional occupations, regularly self-identify as “working class”, might be taken as further evidence of this desire to self-identify as morally good. For a discussion of class attributions among the privileged, see Friedman, O’Brien and McDonald (2021).

well of surplus labour at will is a key means of maximising profit in economic production). There is even some evidence that members of this class not only routinely think that they *deserve* the various advantages attached to their position, but also hold that the ultimate explanation for their success is their *genetic superiority* to the less fortunate (Suhay, Klašnja and Rivero 2021).

The second source of evidence for the basic sociological fact is historical. A compelling case can be made that it is concerted collective agency on the part of members of the capitalist class, and their frustration with what they regarded as the overweening power of the state and organised labour, that is at least partly responsible for making our economies considerably *more* unequal since the 1970s (Therborn 2002, 223; Streeck 2014; Wright 2015b, 138). In short, it is because of the desires of members of this group to maintain and expand the various privileges attached to their offices, and increase private profits, that they attempted to break out of the social democratic compact.

This is what caused many members of this class to set about the long-term dissemination, via a complex web of think tanks and sympathetic politicians, of a range of reputable-looking policies that would be far more conducive to their own economic interests, providing them with novel sources of enrichment and a generally freer hand in commanding labour (see, for the American context, MacLean, 2017). As David Harvey notes, those at the very centre of neoliberal governments in the 1980s were fully conscious of whose interests they were acting in: “Alan Budd, an economic adviser to Thatcher, later suggested that

'the 1980s policies of attacking inflation by squeezing the economy and public spending were a cover to bash the workers'. Britain created what Marx called 'an industrial reserve army', he went on to observe, the effect of which was to undermine the power of labour and permit capitalists to make easy profits thereafter" (Harvey 2005, 59).⁶⁶

Responses from economic elites to the so-called Meidner plan, a policy which, by insisting that large companies establish wage-earner funds, was designed to move Sweden away from a welfare state based on mere redistributive taxation and towards one in which private profits were seen increasingly as belonging not to business owners but to all workers (as in a property-owning democracy) serves as another good example. An initially popular proposal among trade unions and citizens more broadly, the degree to which it was seen as harming the short-term interests of capital owners caused it to crumble under the organized solidarity of the wealthy. As Robin Blackburn summarizes, when the plan was announced:

the country's business leaders were intensely alarmed and spent five times more money attacking the plan than the cash laid out by all the parties on the 1982 election.

The privately owned press ran a sustained and vigorous campaign exploiting every real or supposed weakness in

⁶⁶ As the Thatcher example makes clear, this often results in the state applying brutal force to instantiate order and protect the property rights of capitalists (Gamble 1988).

the plan [...] Under assault, support for the scheme ebbed (Blackburn 2002, 15).

Similarly, the sociologist Michael Mann, for instance, writes that capitalism being given a “human face” was “the outcome of struggle” against the privileged (2012, 280). The empirical literature on the extension of the suffrage perhaps also serves as a useful illustration of this point, where it seems clear that, as Przeworski puts it, “the poorer classes *fought their way* into the representative institutions” against the fierce resistance of the wealthiest (Przeworski 2009, 291, emphasis added). Barry also points to “the capital flight that brought the new socialist government in France to its knees in 1981” as a further example of capitalist resistance to egalitarian social change (Barry 2002, 178).

Something that it is very important to recognise here is that the capitalist class appear to not only pose a constraint on the achievement of economic justice (narrowly construed) but also on justice more generally. Removing gender-based inequalities plausibly requires a set of radical economic changes, for instance: a considerably shortened working week, greater flexibility over working hours (including greater opportunities for paid and unpaid leave, and for transitioning from this back into paid employment), enhanced state provision for child and elder care, free shelters and support for those fleeing domestic abuse, and so on. It is only then that women will not generally be forced into

part-time, lower-paid jobs than men because of the caring responsibilities it is widely assumed they are primarily responsible for, and women will not be forced to stay with abusive partners out of economic necessity (Phillips 1983, 48; Phillips 1987, 68). But feminist demands like these, as Phillips notes, “go against current criteria of profitability” pursued by the capitalist class (Phillips 1983, 69).⁶⁷ The capitalist class will thus also pose a feasibility constraint on the achievement of at least these aspects of gender justice.

The point also seems to apply more broadly. Given that at least part of what appears to be required to end racial injustice, climate injustice, and global injustice is what Vanessa Wills terms “a massive redirection and mobilization of material resources”, capitalist class interests can be viewed as often presenting a feasibility constraint on achieving justice for these causes too, given that taking these resources and redistributing them towards these ends will not always involve “turn[ing] capitalists any profits and, indeed, will [often] eat into their margins” (Wills 2018, 244). In each case, my claim is not that removing the feasibility constraint posed by the capitalist class will be *sufficient* to deliver a perfectly just world, only that the capitalist class are likely among the constraining features which prevent the emergence of such a world.

It is for all these reasons that I think there ought to be a general presumption that members of this dominant class constitute the

⁶⁷ For fascinating explorations of some of these arguments as they pertain to feminist justice, see Ghodsee (2019) and Müller (2020).

political adversaries of projects of egalitarian social change such as property-owning democracy, liberal socialism, and social democracy, and potentially even of social and global justice more broadly.⁶⁸ Of course, the different egalitarian institutional schemes discussed in the introduction will likely trigger different levels of hostility. In broad terms, it seems reasonable to speculate that the more elements of the capitalist or neoliberal status quo that remain recognisable after the egalitarian scheme has been implemented, the less hostile the capitalist class is likely to be to these changes coming about. But my point is that even the egalitarian institutional scheme that is most permissive when it comes to maintaining existing features of the status quo – turbo-charged social democracy - still calls for radically wide-reaching changes that are likely to generate very high levels of hostility indeed.

Given the steep rightward drift in politics and economics in the advanced capitalist democracies since the 1970s, even those egalitarians who caution against the radicalism of liberal socialism and prefer a turbo-charged social democracy or property-owning democracy, are still committed to endorsing far-reaching, practically revolutionary, changes that radically curtail capitalist power possibility spaces. In essence, it is politically very naïve to assume that this class of

⁶⁸ An adversary is not *quite* the same as an enemy. An enemy is to be stripped of all rights and respectful treatment, whereas an *adversary* is someone who we engage in political combat with, but where we nonetheless recognise certain moral limits on the forms this combat can take (Mouffe 2000, 101–2). The term derives from the Latin *adversus*, signifying someone that has "turned towards" me in a hostile fashion (Hoad 1996, 6).

economically very privileged individuals will possess a benevolent view of a party-agency attempting to implement any of the above set of changes.

3.3 “A compass for stormy seas”: class consciousness as aid

I hope to have done enough to establish that the capitalist class constitute a significant feasibility constraint on the ability of a party agency committed to radical egalitarian change to successfully establish these changes. What kinds of outcomes under present political circumstances might reduce or remove this constraint? My claim in this section is that raising transformative egalitarian class consciousness among as many members of the citizenry of the advanced capitalist democracies as possible, is such a feasibility-enhancing outcome.

Effective participation in political life requires the making of a whole series of political judgments: judgments about what is happening and why, what constraints we collectively operate under, what the consequences of a given course of action are likely to be, and what it is necessary to do (or what *should* have been done) given all of this. These judgments are frequently incredibly difficult to make well, because, for most individuals, political decision-making is only one area of their lives in which evaluation and judgment are required, and often not the area which individuals tend to prioritize. This is compounded by the fact that the judgments must almost always, and especially at moments of political upheaval, be made under situations of huge uncertainty:

uncertainty about both the *circumstances* in which we find ourselves and what the *outcome* of various available courses of action is likely to be (Peter 2018). Sometimes, perhaps even most of the time, clear answers to the above questions simply aren't forthcoming, and yet judgment is still called for.

To deal with this uncertainty, political actors frequently use simplifying frames to orient themselves in the political world and aid their decision-making. These cognitive frames, as Kinder and Sanders have put it, "order and give meaning to the parade of events" that individuals "witness in public life" (Kinder and Sanders 1996, 39). These frames in thought guide individuals as they evaluate situations by putting emphasis on certain aspects of the social world - marking them out as particularly salient features - and de-emphasizing others. As Allen Buchanan describes it, they "help us orient ourselves without having to rely on impossibly large amounts of information that would, even if we possessed them, require such complex calculations as to preclude timely action for finite creatures like us", reducing the enormous complexity of modern societies to a few simple overgeneralizations (Buchanan 2020, 204).

My claim is that when it comes to navigating the drawn-out political process of overcoming capitalist resistance that I hope to have established will almost certainly be necessary to achieve egalitarian social change, ^(TE) class consciousness can act as a very useful heuristic or rule of thumb. Citizens will be *more able* to overcome the feasibility constraint I have identified *with* this consciousness, than without it.

Class consciousness, in Lukács's lovely phrase, can essentially provide a *guide* or *compass*, helping us navigate the "wild and stormy seas" of class struggle (Lukács 2009 [1924], 83). The features of the environment that it highlights are precisely the kinds of features that agents need to be highly conscious of if they are to successfully navigate the treacherous terrain of class struggle. Without this consciousness, agents are, to quote Lukács again, likely doomed to "totter to and fro in the labyrinth of external events", unable to focus on the most important aspects of social reality for the task at hand, and thus unable to act proactively upon it (Lukács 2014c [1919], 29).

Of course, mere possession of ^(TE) class consciousness clearly does not translate into anything like an "automatic victory" in this class struggle by itself (Lukács 1971c [1920], 53). But my claim is that the existence of the capitalist class means there will almost certainly be very 'stormy seas' on the route to the realisation of a radically more just economic system, and that widespread possession of ^(TE) class consciousness is the kind of outcome that aids citizens as they try to navigate these waters. Here is a list of some of the most important ways in which I envision class consciousness being a useful heuristic: it can help grant its possessors a firm sense of who their political adversaries are and concentrate their political attention on the activities of this group, assist them in distinguishing successfully between sincere advocates of social change and self-serving opportunists and their political adversaries, help its possessors gain and maintain their commitment at crucial political moments, grant them a sense of

collective power and political possibility, and help them refrain from being drawn in by the potentially emotionally appealing defences of the old order that will be offered to attempt to shore up support for it in the wake of crises. In short, under a range of reasonable circumstances, the complex of robustly action-guiding beliefs and desires central to ^(TE) class consciousness can provide a reliable guide to navigating at least one crucial aspect of the political realm.

Despite the way I draw on Lukács's writings to make this claim, I actually view this heuristic-based argument for the feasibility-enhancing role of raised class consciousness to be an improvement on the traditional argument Lukács offers for it. For Lukács, class consciousness enables workers to accurately "*foresee* the trajectory of the objective economic forces and to *forecast* what the appropriate actions of the working class must be in the situation so created" (Lukács 2009 [1924], 32, emphasis added). Heuristics, by contrast, are understood as involving inaccuracies and simplifications, but that can nonetheless aid good decision-making in the right kinds of circumstances (Buchanan 2020, 205). In essence, the argument for the value of a heuristic is much less *epistemically ambitious*: it just says that, provided certain features of the social world hold true (for instance, the class structure persists in something like its current form), then this belief complex can provide a useful *aid* to decision making. But it does not hold that its authentic possession safely guards against *all* forms of political misjudgement.

It is an important part of my argument that this point appears to

hold regardless of *exactly* how we think the class struggle to secure greater equality will or ought to play out. Political theorists do not have access to the kind of crystal ball that would allow them to become informed about exactly how this class struggle (this struggle against the resistance of the capitalist class to egalitarian social change) needs to play out for radically egalitarian social change to become feasible under present political circumstances. So, it is an attractive feature of my argument that it doesn't rely on just one specific transitional pathway playing out to be compelling. My claim is that regardless of *exactly* how things play out, a citizenry equipped with ^(TE) class consciousness is far more likely to successfully navigate this transitional path.

One potential path that the attempt to overcome the resistance of the capitalist class to egalitarian social change might plausibly take is a simultaneous “inside-outside” strategy. A political party committed to a fundamental egalitarian overhaul of the capitalist status quo may be propelled into the state with a mandate to use its levers to change laws and implement policy change. But, almost certainly, given the currently extensive powers of the capitalist class, a left government by itself would lack the power to put its reforms into place. It will thus likely need to be accompanied by what Nicos Poulantzas calls “a second power composed of *popular organs*” (Poulantzas 1980, 264, emphasis added). The idea is that a “broad popular movement” (social movement protests and demonstrations, strikes and acts of civil disobedience) “constitutes a guarantee against the reaction of the enemy” (or adversary) in a way a movement that just entering the “inside” of the

state would not (Poulantzas 1980, 263). Popular organs can apply types of political pressure to the beneficiaries of class injustice that those inside the state are simply unable to by themselves.

To give just one example, political scientists generally credit the mass participation of the European working class in political organisations, in the face of fierce opposition from the more privileged, as one of the central factors that led to the post-war instantiation of the welfare state (Esping-Andersen 1990; Klein 2017). As Thomas Piketty (2020, 185) notes, “People [...] often think of Sweden as a country that has always been inherently egalitarian. [But] This is not true: until the early twentieth century Sweden was a profoundly inegalitarian country, in some respects more inegalitarian than countries elsewhere in Europe; or, rather, it was more sophisticated in organizing its inequality and more systematic in expressing its proprietarian ideology and shaping its institutional incarnation.” Piketty goes on to credit “*effective popular mobilization*” as key in transforming Sweden from the inegalitarian capitalist paradise it once was, to become the largely social democratic enclave it is today (Piketty 2020, 185, emphasis added).

Similarly, in Britain, the Taff Vale court case of 1901 effectively abolished the right to strike by making trade unions liable for loss of profits to employers that were caused by taking strike action. It was only when the working class (and sections of the middle class) united behind a sufficiently powerful electoral vehicle (the Labour Party), that, six years later, this decision was finally reversed (Nairn 1964, 42). Popular mobilisation of sufficient strength and for a sufficient period of

time can change the calculations for members of the capitalist class and the broader political elite – making resistance too costly and compromise favourable to the disadvantaged the preferable option.⁶⁹

Additionally, because members of the capitalist class have long been accustomed to their various privileges and powers, it is also highly implausible that they will consent to egalitarian social change after just one political defeat. They will instead likely regard this situation as what Lukács calls “a temporary shift in the balance of power which can be reversed tomorrow” (Lukács, 1971d [1920], 267). The counter-power members of other classes must build up must thus endure over a sufficient period to fundamentally change the calculations of members of this group. The costs of following through on their resistance must come to be considered by them as too high. This is why this particular feasibility constraint can very likely only be removed or sufficiently minimized if a critical mass of citizens engages in a sustained way in forms of political struggle that can overpower the beneficiaries of

⁶⁹ It is highly plausible that popular pressure *within* the United States would be necessary to stably implement egalitarian social change in advanced capitalist nations outside of the US. This is because of the status of the United States as the chief global player in the defence the interests of the capitalist class. For a comprehensive and persuasive account of the central role that the American state has historically played - and continues to play to this day - in the management of global capitalism, see Panitch and Gindin (2012). Gindin and Panitch use the term “informal empire” to describe the United States’ role: its power relies less on “territorial expansion, military conquest, and colonialism” (although these things can sometimes still be important) and more on “economic expansion and influence” (Panitch and Gindin 2012, 5). The US dollar is the primary currency of global exchange, for instance. For this reason, as Colas notes, “it is unlikely that alternatives to US power will be sustained” in other advanced capitalist countries “without the radical transformation of US society and polity” itself (Colas 2007, 191).

injustice.

If even this novel form of dual-power was to prove insufficient, popular mobilisation and class struggle that attempts to overpower the current beneficiaries of class injustice may even ultimately have to take the form of a political revolution, understood as the overthrowing of existing political and economic institutions and their replacement with new ones “by violent or [...] unconstitutional means” (Buchanan 2013, 291).⁷⁰ Or perhaps some third pathway, different from both of these, is in fact more feasible.

It is important to state that a process of radical egalitarian social change along one of these lines can plausibly cope with a series of differentiated commitment levels (Mansbridge 2001, 12). There certainly needs to be a significant “militant minority”: these are the “political entrepreneurs” or “trend-setters” who dedicate great swathes of their lives to political activity (Utrecht and Eidlin 2019 Sunstein

⁷⁰ That Buchanan leaves space for *non-violent* but still *unconstitutional* change is an important part of this definition of revolution: we can imagine processes of social contention which eventually involve a transition of political power, and in which established and legally codified rules around this transition of political power are broken in some way, but this does not necessarily involve murder or other kinds of physical violence. For example, we might imagine a process of social transformation in which the legitimacy of a centralised state is challenged and eventually begins to slip away, with workers and local communities beginning to make binding collective decisions for themselves through workers councils and/or local assemblies which start to be carried out, violating the rules set down in the nation’s codified or uncodified constitution about where the national seat of power is and what the process for making binding political decisions is. Ralph Miliband also makes the point that even a wholesale political transformation that takes place “within the existing constitutional and legal framework” is still not technically a revolution (Miliband 1987, 336).

2019) and play a role in organising and coordinating political actions of various kind. But the vast majority of people can contribute from a place of lesser commitment, provided they attend at least some of the various events and actions planned by this minority, and make contributions of their own. Even just sympathetic or nonchalant observers can play a role by not committing themselves to participating in the activity of opposing political tendencies. My claim is that in each case – that of the militant minority, active supports, and sympathetic observers – their success in overcoming the resistance of the capitalist class is more assured if they are equipped with ^(TE) class consciousness than if they lack it.

Of course, it certainly won't be possible to raise ^(TE) class consciousness among anything like the entirety of the working and middle class. In my view, we should think instead in terms of a broad *egalitarian constituency* made up of existing supporters of egalitarian economic change, as well as those who "might realistically come to be" motivated to support it (Laurence 2020, 362). Whilst this constituency will most likely be overwhelmingly constituted by people who belong to the working class (given that the fortunes and wellbeing of many, although not all, members of the middle class, are too directly tied up in serving the capitalist status quo), it will also not overlap perfectly with the contours of this class group. For example, some members of the working class will already have very settled and firmly held political beliefs which are anathema to the development of ^(TE) class consciousness (such as a firm belief in right-libertarianism, or a strong

commitment to avoiding participating in political activity until the second coming of Jesus Christ). And there are also likely at least some members of the middle class – particularly those who are facing “proletarianizing” pressures at work,⁷¹ or have existing firmly held beliefs in the need for egalitarian economic change, as well as some people who do not directly occupy nodes in the social structure of production, like the retired, non-employed students, and the unemployed, who may realistically come to hold these views as well.

There are a few sources of evidence we can draw on to support this claim that it is realistic to raise the consciousness of many members of this constituency who currently lack this consciousness. For one thing, many of the political attitudes of the most economically disadvantaged are already “consistently characterised by an egalitarian ethos when it comes to state-led reallocation of economic resources” (Atkinson 2020, 155; Evans and Tilley 2017, chapter four; Evans 1999; Goldthorpe 2001, 112-116). It is among this group that one is most likely to find beliefs that there is “one law for the rich and one for the poor”, that corporations are only interested in making profit, rather than meeting people’s needs, and currently have too much power, that regardless of which party is in power, things are unlikely to get better for me and those I love, and so on, all of which can be considered to map

⁷¹ Many citizens that work in traditionally “middle class” “professional” occupations, such as teachers, now have material conditions of existence that are strikingly similar to those in traditionally working class roles and thus could feasibly come to share in such views (Moody 2017; Zweig 2012).

fairly neatly on to the kinds of beliefs and desires the class consciousness-raiser will be seeking to generate.

This existing egalitarian ethos is admittedly more likely to occur among those members of the working class that work in caring professions, because these workers are likely to possess particularly deep grievances about the way market mechanisms and inequality interfere with their ability to care for others (Jones 2001; Cohen 2009, 59–60, 81).⁷² Condon and Wichowsky also note that “socioeconomic elite are invisible to most Americans, geographically concentrated in cities” (Condon and Wichowsky 2020, 158). Because those living in highly urban environments are thus more likely to “encounter the affluent other”, we might also venture the hypothesis that those living in large cities where they are less isolated from the wealthy, will also be more likely to form part of the egalitarian constituency (Condon and Wichowsky 2020, 158). But a propensity to these views has been documented across a wide range of other occupational roles, and not exclusively among the urban working class too (e.g. Atkinson 2017, 75;

⁷² In essence, different sub-sections of the working class are more or less likely to be receptive to attempts to raise class consciousness, because the kind of work they perform socialises them into a kind of ethos or sensibility that is more conducive to transformative egalitarian beliefs. For further empirical evidence on “occupation-specific homogeneity in behaviors and worldviews” see Weeden and Grusky (2005, 186ff.) The claim here is that factors such as self-selection into occupations deemed to “fit” one’s existing worldview, combined with the receipt of in-work training and continuous social interaction with those in similar roles once in work, combine to generate similarity of sensibility among those working in the same occupation. We might imagine, for example, the comparative greater likelihood of raising the transformative egalitarian class consciousness of a social worker, teacher, or nurse, than that of a police officer, prison officer, or soldier.

Wright 1985, 146).

Secondly, even among those who do not currently hold these attitudes, the political views they do hold are often best thought of as “nonattitudes” or “ideologically innocent”: because of a limited exposure to political ideas and limited time spent thinking about political issues, many members of the egalitarian constituency currently lack firm or settled views about what the best lens through which to view political life is (Kinder and Kalmoe 2017; Moy 2008; Sturgis and Smith 2010). A lack of settled views is particularly likely to be the case among younger members of disadvantaged classes, because it is often the young who are least accustomed to thinking that the way things are is the way they should be or will be in the future. Often, becoming older is not so much about becoming more mature (although obviously this happens too), as it is just about *forgetting* the angst and resistance we feel about things when we were younger (Deutscher, 1971 [1966], 252; Finlayson 2015, 192; Finlayson 2021; Ganz 2010, 531). Younger people are generally more receptive to new ideas and beliefs, as their process of “political socialisation” is still ongoing (Neundorf and Smets 2017).

Thus, whilst it will certainly not be possible to raise class consciousness among anything like all non-capitalist members of a given society, I conclude that there is a sizeable constituency of citizens – what I termed the egalitarian constituency – among whom the raising of (TE) class consciousness could plausibly take place. And I further claim that a more widespread possession of this consciousness would vastly increase the prospects for the overcoming of the feasibility constraint

currently posed by the capitalist class.

3.4 Avoiding reductionism

In contemporary political discussions of class (both academic and activist), accusations of “class reductionism” occur frequently (Bohrer 2020, 159-163; Cicerchia 2021, 606). So, one worry that many people will likely have at this stage of the argument is that there is something reductive or otherwise unsavoury about our claims in this chapter about the feasibility constraint posed by the capitalist class and the value of a project of class consciousness-raising. In the hope of putting such a worry to bed, I conclude this chapter by exploring in detail what class reductionism is and why I think the argument I have constructed here avoids falling prey to it.

Despite the relative frequency with which accusations of class reductionism are made against academics and activists who make class central to their descriptive and evaluative terminology, it is actually very hard to find an extended engagement in the academic literature with the idea of what exactly class reductionism involves. Instead, the attribution of it to one or another thinker or figure is usually made in passing, to illustrate the kinds of claims the author doesn’t want to or clearly shouldn’t make (McLennan 1996, 54). Nevertheless, we can begin to gain a clearer picture of the reductionist complaint by examining two sets of examples of feminist, anti-racist and “post-

Marxist" thinkers deploying the charge in the course of their arguments.

One view often labelled as class reductionist is the view that all forms of oppression can - in Linda Martín Alcoff's words - "be explained entirely in reference to the economic forces of capitalism" (Alcoff, cited in Gray-Rosendale 2005, 252). This view holds that the ultimate cause of women's oppression and racial oppression is essentially that it serves capitalist class interests. The socialist-feminist thinker Michèle Barrett also distances herself from what she describes as the reductionist view that an adequate explanation of women's oppression can be offered solely by making "reference to the [...] requirements of capitalist production and reproduction" (Barrett 1988, xxii). On the view she discusses, the domination of women by men as it is experienced in capitalist countries is essentially "created by", or just an effect of the ruling capitalist class, as they seek to organise production in such a way that most efficiently maximizes the extraction of surplus value (Barrett 1988, 22). On such a view, it is the interests of the capitalist class in maximizing profits which "exhaust[s] the list of causal social relations" necessary to adequately explain the emergence of this instances of oppression (Harding 1981, 144).⁷³

A second set of claims about class reductionism, is the view discussed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe that there is a *necessary causal link* between occupying a certain disadvantaged position in the social structure of production and coming to hold a

⁷³ Anthony Giddens (1981, 242) and Charles W. Mills (1988, 255) also critically discuss the same view.

broadly anti-capitalist or pro-socialist “mentality” (Laclau and Mouffe 2014 [1985], 85). On this view, the experiences of being working class necessarily lead individuals to possess a certain set of beliefs about what is in their best interests, such as which party to vote for in elections (Laclau and Mouffe 2014 [1985], 76; Laclau and Mouffe 1987, 96). Barry Hindess also critically discusses a similar view, in which a particular set of beliefs or political interests can simply be read off “from membership of a social category”, and gives the example of manual workers, by virtue of their position in the class structure, supposedly necessarily being committed to specifically egalitarian ideas about fairness and justice (Hindess 1987, 97). The class reductionist might concede that these beliefs generated by class occupancy will not always be consistent, or will sometimes lie latent, but possession of them, in one form or another, can nevertheless, on this view, “be assumed to follow simply from membership of the working class” (Hindess 1987, 97).

Based on these two sets of examples, we can state that the category of claims to which accusations of reductionism appear to be most appropriately applied is: *(attempted) causal explanations*. Causal explanations in the social sciences typically isolate: (a) some social phenomenon, event or state of affairs which is the object to be explained (often called an *explanandum*) and (b) a second phenomenon or set of phenomena which temporally precedes the *explanandum* and is claimed to explain or sufficiently account for the existence of this *explanandum* (often called an *explanans*) (Cunningham 1987, 206; cf.

Elster 2015, 1-3).⁷⁴

Both cases of class reductionism discussed above feature different *explanandum* and *explanans*, but follow this basic pattern: the *explanandum* is some apparently non-class related phenomena, like an instance or many instances of gender or racial oppression, or a belief or set of beliefs held by individuals within society. In the first case, the *explanans* is “capitalist class interests” or something similar, whereas in the latter case, it is “occupation of a working class node” (Cunningham 1987, 214).

Arguably, *all* attempts at causal explanation reduce the complexity of the world to certain more simple and isolatable variables. Some form of reductionism, as McLennan notes, is thus “perhaps [...] inescapable in any searching explanatory endeavour”: part of what we mean by an explanation is that we can assign some factor or set of factors greater prominence in causing a given social phenomena than others (McLennan 1996, 72 cf. Geras 1990, 11). But class reductionism is a pejorative term, with negative connotations – no one ever *celebrates* being a class reductionist, because the idea behind the charge is that, at least in many, even most situations, attempting to explain the above *explanandums* in a class-centric way *over-privileges* or *over-emphasises* class-related phenomena and omits further important determining phenomena in a way that leads to incomplete and

⁷⁴ Elster calls this “the basic event-event pattern of explanation” or “the “billiard-ball” model of causal explanation: “One event, ball A hitting ball B, is the cause of – and thus explains – another event, namely, ball B’s beginning to move” (Elster 2015, 3).

misleading explanations which deserve condemnation (Hindess 1987, 89).

A class reductionist claim is distinct, in other words, from a class *significance* or class *importance* claim. In the latter, capitalist class interests, or occupation of a working class node, *are among several of the central factors* that causes a given social phenomena (Wright 2015c, 143; 155). But a class reductionist makes the further claim that we can accurately and comprehensively account for some *explanans exclusively* or *solely* by referring to class-related phenomena. The worry of authors like Alcoff, Barrett, Harding, Hindess and Laclau and Mouffe is essentially that reductionist claims obscure the important fact that, in both cases discussed, a range of distinct other mechanisms are either contributing alongside this one, or instead of it, to determine the *explanandum* under discussion: other crucial contributing causal factors in the explanations are in actual fact *irreducible* and necessary to any accurate and comprehensive explanation or accounting for some phenomena.⁷⁵

It is not hard to think of various ways in which subscribing to

⁷⁵ Of course, arguments about class are not the only domain in which these overly reductive causal arguments are made. We can also imagine various forms of “gender reductionism” or “race reductionism” (see, e.g., Reed 2020). Andrew Sayer’s article (2010) provides a useful list of some of the many other kinds of reductive arguments that are often made, including: hyper-individualistic arguments about personal responsibility, which ignores that there are broader social influences on things like crime levels and class positions (Sayer 2010, 32-3) and naturalistic or essentialist arguments about gender which claim that the reason women are overrepresented in caring professions is because women are “naturally” more caring (Sayer 2010, 25-6).

reductionist claims will be misleading, or even actively pernicious. For example, if one holds to the truth of the first reductionist claim considered above (that the actions and interests of the capitalist class are the primary originating cause of racial and gender-based oppression), then it is easy to be at least somewhat ambivalent or dismissive, about the deep-rootedness of forms of oppression other than class. Holding to this belief encourages a blindness to the fact that - as Barrett and many others have pointed out - oppressive structures of e.g., male dominance in many ways predate the emergence of the capitalist class, rather than just being an epiphenomenon caused by this group (Barrett 1988, 24; cf. 249). As Alcoff puts it, "women's oppression [...] is certainly [often] beneficial to capitalism" but it "needs to be explained also in reference to a precapitalist sexual division of labor" (Alcoff, cited in Gray-Rosendale 2005, 252).

As well as leading to a certain kind of ambivalence about forms of oppression other than class, endorsing this first reductionist claim also makes it relatively easy to think that social struggles that are not directly aimed at dispossessing or challenging the capitalist class should simply "line up behind" this class struggle, which should take precedence. This is the view that struggle against the capitalist class is "necessary and sufficient" to eliminate and combat "extraclass oppression" (Cunningham 1987, 213) and thus "class struggle [should] always be given pride of place in popular organization and in political programmes" and "movements against extraclass oppressions [should] be subordinated to class struggle" (Cunningham 1987, 216-7). It

encourages, in other words, a belief that once capitalism is vanquished, all other forms of inequality will fade away too.

As Anne Phillips describes her interactions with those who hold this position, the promise was always to simply “wait till after the revolution” for gender (and racial) grievances to be adequately taken care of (Phillips 1987, 142; cf. Alcoff, cited in Gray-Rosendale 2005, 249). This highly long-term view that - as Barrett puts it - “the interests of women [or blacks] are identical with those of the [male, white] working class” (Barrett 1988, 22; Mouffe, cited in Hansen and Sonnichsen 2014, 263) of course disguises various conflicts of interests that might emerge between these groups in the present because of the various ways in which white working class men occupy an advantageous position compared to many women and non-whites across certain domains (Phillips 1987).

The second claim considered above (that occupying a working class node necessarily produces an anti-capitalist or pro-socialist “mentality”) can be equally problematic. For one thing, it might lead to a complacency about the state of support for egalitarian ideals, assuming that there is a solid base for fundamental change whenever and wherever class disadvantage exists, which of course neglects the fact that political beliefs about what is in my best interest as an agent are best thought of instead as a “precarious historical product which are always subjected to processes of dissolution and redefinition” (Laclau and Mouffe 1987, 97). Whether individuals come to hold certain political beliefs or not, is in fact highly contingent on whether particular

political agents are successful in constructing or creating them, rather than occurring naturally because of economic position. Large chunks of the working class have always voted for economically conservative policies and figures, for instance.⁷⁶ It can also lead to various kinds of lazy *ad hominem* attacks in which any political argument made which one doesn't like can just be dismissed as being caused by the fact that the argument-maker is insufficiently truly embedded in the working class.

Now that we are clearer about what class reductionism is, and why it can be so pernicious, we can hopefully also see why the claims I have been making so far (concerning the feasibility constraint posed by the capitalist class, and the feasibility-enhancing nature of raising class consciousness) avoid being class reductionist. I certainly have not been claiming that the capitalist class are the primary constraint on the arrival of a perfectly just, oppression-free world. Instead, I have claimed only that they pose an important obstacle to the achievement of egalitarian economic justice. And I certainly have not been claiming that class consciousness will come *easily* or is already possessed by all members of the working class. Instead, I have claimed only that there is a constituency of people (the egalitarian constituency), centrally including many members of the working class, among whom it will often be feasible to engender this consciousness. My hope is that the remarks in this section do enough to alleviate the worry that there is

⁷⁶ For fascinating historical studies of “popular conservatism” in Britain, see Neuheiser (2016) and Roberts (2007).

something necessarily ‘reductive’ about the very attempt to make class central to our normative theorising. It is perfectly possible to make class importance claims, in other words, without lapsing into reductionism.

3.5 Looking ahead: what does consciousness-raising entail?

This chapter aimed to fill out the first two stages of our transitional theory, identifying both (1) a significant feasibility constraint on the achievement of egalitarian economic justice (the capitalist class) and (2) a feasibility-enhancing outcome that would significantly increase the chances of achieving the ultimate transitional goal by lessening this constraint (raising transformative egalitarian class consciousness, or, for ease of exposition, ^(TE) class consciousness). I began with an account of the feasibility of instituting a turbo-charged social democracy, property-owning democracy or liberal market socialist regime under present political circumstances. I then drew on both historical and contemporary empirical evidence to claim that members of the capitalist class are very likely to resist this institutionalisation and thus represent a significant “soft constraint” on the achievement of egalitarian economic justice.

I then moved on to argue that raising ^(TE) class consciousness is an outcome which would enhance the feasibility of achieving the ultimate transitional goal by lessening the constraint posed by the

capitalist class. This relates to the useful *heuristic* role that I claimed (TE) class consciousness can play: citizens armed with this type of consciousness are more capable of emerging victorious in the class struggle against the beneficiaries of economic injustice that inevitably must be waged if egalitarian economic transformations are to be sustainably implemented. I noted that whilst it will not be possible to raise this consciousness among all citizens, there is a substantial possible coalition of citizens, which I termed the “egalitarian constituency” (comprised of existing supporters of egalitarian economic change and many others who can potentially come to be so supportive) among whom this consciousness-raising could take place. The chapter also featured an extended discussion of the idea of “class reductionism” and demonstrated how the arguments I have made thus far can make class central without lapsing into reductive claims.

So, if raising a particular kind of class consciousness can be feasibility-enhancing, what might “raising” or “building” class consciousness entail exactly? This is not something that has - to the best of my knowledge - ever been discussed at length by contemporary political theorists. But where it is mentioned (usually in passing), consciousness-raising is generally taken to involve two states of thinking, one “lower” or “lesser” and one “higher” or “greater” in some way, and the process itself describes a passage or movement from the former to the latter. Haslanger, for instance, talks of consciousness-raising as involving “a paradigm shift in one’s orientation to the world” (Haslanger, 2021, 44; cf. Fung 2020, 153). Consciousness raising can

thus be understood as a kind of “epistemic transformation”: a long-lasting, sometimes even irrevocable, alteration or modification of what one believes and the way in which one thinks, similar to – for instance – the paradigm shift that can occur as a result of receiving a university education (Paul and Quiggin 2020, 568).⁷⁷ An initial definition is thus that an agent has their consciousness raised or built when at least one of the beliefs or desires central to a particular form of political consciousness are (a) generated where they were previously absent, or (b) come to play a more significant role in their thinking and acting than they did previously.

By itself, however, this description of what consciousness raising involves seems to ignore that it will not always, or even usually be possible just to transform the beliefs of others in so straightforward a fashion. Individuals will typically exhibit at least a degree of resistance to having their beliefs changed. In my view, it has been a recurrent failure of proponents of some version of egalitarian class consciousness-raising to make the implications of this crucial fact central to their strategic thinking.

For example, Lukács (1971a [1923], 204) seems to suggest that it is “the inevitable consequence” of capitalist development that the proletariat come to see capitalism for what it really is. This forms part

⁷⁷ Haslanger (2021, 44) also makes the fact that consciousness-raising is something “done with others” central to her account, whereas on my own, the specific *means* by which beliefs and desires are generated (be it collectively, on one’s own, through education, through conversation, even through some external event) are not embedded into my definition as such.

of a long tradition of Marxist writers who seemed to hold that the “material conditions” will create an environment favourable to class consciousness-raising all by themselves, and thereby create a mass of people intellectually open to persuasion. On this deeply inadequate view, all that consciousness-raisers need to do is to capitalise on this openness and inculcate the specific beliefs and desires central to their preferred conception of class consciousness.

A more plausible model of consciousness-raising, by contrast, needs to be sensitive to the various kinds of reasons why individuals might be resistant to changing their beliefs, despite facing disadvantageous “material conditions.” In my view, there appear to be two main reasons why individuals do not change their beliefs when encouraged to do so by a consciousness-raiser. First, there can be overt opposition to even considering a potential belief change, because the new candidate set of beliefs appear to the belief-holder to be *incompatible with their existing set of beliefs* (including their beliefs about themselves as good people) or appear nonsensical in some way in the light of existing beliefs.

Second, there can be an absence of this overt opposition, and thus a certain potential compatibility between a candidate set of beliefs and an individual’s existing psychological commitments, but a belief change can nonetheless still fail to occur because the individual can be unwilling to *dedicate the time required* to sufficiently consider these novel beliefs and work to integrate them into their existing thinking.

As a result of these two reasons, in my view, consciousness

raising is better understood as a three-stage process where epistemic transformation (class conscious-raising “proper”) does not in fact occur until the third and final stage. The first stage is that of *disrupting* the existing “frames” that individuals apply to political affairs that de facto rule out considering class conscious beliefs and desires to be intelligible ones. We can term this stage “epistemic disruption”, because epistemic disruption is generally held to occur when the settled conceptual frameworks individuals use to think about and understand the world and their place in it are interrupted or unsettled in some way (Hayward 2020, 458).⁷⁸ Epistemically disruptive practices thus *lay the foundations* for even more psychologically impactful activist interventions in the future.

It is an important feature of epistemic disruption that it typically only results in “partial and temporary interruptions” to habitual thought patterns (Hayward 2020, 458), however. Given the impermanent nature of epistemic disruption, sticking only to this stage is very unlikely to lead to consciousness-raising proper all by itself. Instead, individuals are likely to simply fall back into their old habitual thought patterns sometime after the disruptive intervention has ended. But the goal of disruption is to *do enough to get individuals to be receptive to* an important second stage: generating participatory intent. I define participatory intent as a relatively robust intention to undertake some further form of political activity after the intent-

⁷⁸ “Disruption” derives from the Latin term *disrumpere*, meaning to break (*rumpere*) apart (*dis*) (Hoad 1996, 129).

generating activist intervention has taken place. This forms a crucial second precursor stage to epistemic transformation because epistemic transformation *takes time* and is only likely to play out successfully if an agent is committed in some shape or form to some future amount of time re-evaluating or reordering their beliefs and desires to some extent. It is then only after these two stages have been successfully passed through, in my view, that consciousness-raising “proper” can take place.

Accordingly, the final three chapters of this thesis are each dedicated to one of these three important stages. I begin below with a discussion of epistemic disruption and two practices that I claim possess transitional value as a means to achieve it, before turning in chapters five and six to the generation of participatory intent and epistemic transformation itself. The hope is that these three stages, when carried out together, will be subject to a looping effect or what Taylor, Nanz and Taylor aptly term “dynamics of expansion” (2020: 25-6). The hope is that at least a subsection of the previously politically disengaged that pass through each of these three stages of consciousness-raising, then become encouraged to join in these processes of disruption, the generation of participatory intent, and epistemic transformation themselves, thereby growing the pool of people that consciousness-raisers can reach with their interventions.

4

The Transitional Value of Disruptive Discourse

and Disruptive Action

In chapter three, I referred to the notion of “simplifying frames” which political actors can use to orient themselves in the political world and aid their decision-making under highly uncertain circumstances. I claimed that ^(TE) class consciousness is just the kind of simplifying frame that members of the egalitarian constituency need if they are to successfully navigate the process of collective class struggle that must unfold if radical egalitarian social change is to be realised.

However, it will often not be possible for consciousness-raisers to just immediately begin inculcating the belief-desire complex central to ^(TE) class consciousness in members of the egalitarian constituency. This is because many members of this group who currently lack class consciousness of any kind currently possess and utilise *other* simplifying frames to orient themselves and aid their decision-making, which make them unsympathetic or even outright hostile to the beliefs and desires central to ^(TE) class consciousness. Thus, in my view, the first stage of consciousness-raising involves attempts to *challenge* these frames and thus create more of an epistemic opening for class conscious beliefs to take hold among such agents at a later date. We can call this process of challenging the kinds of frames which tends to rule out in advance coming to be class conscious *epistemic disruption*.

Epistemic disruption, recall, occurs when the settled conceptual frameworks individuals use to think about and understand the world and their place in it, are interrupted or unsettled in some way (Hayward 2020, 458).

In this chapter, I examine two sets of thought patterns that I think are habitually deployed by many members of the egalitarian constituency in the advanced capitalist democracies and that I claim work to create a hostile environment for class consciousness-raising. The two frames often possessed by members of the egalitarian constituency that I claim must be disrupted by consciousness-raisers under present political circumstances are what I call *divergent status* frames on the one hand (which distribute some members of a community into a social grouping of inferior or lesser status to “regular” members of the community), and *privatistic* frames on the other (which promote general indifference or even antipathy towards broad questions of social organisation and civic participation, and a sole or near-sole focus instead on family life, consumption, leisure, and career advancement). I claim that when individuals are in the thrall of divergent status or privatistic frames, they are highly unlikely to be receptive to attempts to inculcate a class-conscious frame or heuristic, as there is no substantive overlap between this kind of thinking and these individual’s existing set of habitual thought patterns.

The chapter also highlights two specific forms of political practice through which these frames might be effectively and permissibly disrupted. The first practice I highlight is left populism,

understood as a rhetorical strategy of drawing attention to the existence of two antagonistic camps within the citizenry which aims to advance the traditional ideological values of the left. The second practice I highlight is democratic municipalism, understood as democratic associations of local residents that both build and empower neighbourhood assemblies and make improvements to the municipal provision of basic goods and services. I argue that both of these practices ought to be considered desirable means for the creation of the kind of epistemic opening in which class conscious beliefs might take hold among members of the egalitarian constituency at a later date, and thus the creation of a more favourable background environment against which the more involved stages of consciousness-raising can take place.

A caveat is necessary before commencing. The argument I develop in what follows does not intend to comprehensively discuss *all* of the frames that consciousness-raisers must disrupt in present circumstances before they can engage in consciousness-raising in earnest, or *all* of the political practices that might work to achieve this disruption. For instance, whilst I discuss the disruptive value of left populism and democratic municipalism, it is perfectly possible for protest movements (Pineda 2021, chapter four), and public interventions of various sorts by activist intellectuals and artists (Ypi 2012), to also play a disruptive role, but space constraints prevent me from discussing these other practices in more detail here. External events (we might think of the heavy-handed policing of a protest, or a shoddy government response to citizens made homeless through

flooding) can also certainly serve an epistemically disruptive function.

Whilst I just focus on two practices in this chapter, my ultimate hope is that egalitarians can achieve something like a *disruptive network*, in which multifarious left populist rhetorical interventions, democratic municipalist experiments, and other forms of disruptive activity synergistically interlink and bounce off external events to challenge all the varied frames that constitute obstacles to the emergence of participatory intent and, ultimately, class consciousness. I conceive of the chapter as providing several illustrative examples, thereby setting down some thoughts that can serve as the basis for a more extensive taxonomy of these issues at a later date.

4.1 What are divergent status frames?

One set of frames that many members of the egalitarian constituency deploy in their political reasoning, and which pose an obstacle to their coming to possess class consciousness are what I want to call “divergent status” frames.⁷⁹ A divergent status frame distributes some members of a community (whether that be a municipality, nation-state, or the global community) into a social grouping of inferior or lesser status to “regular” members of the community. Here are some examples which often structure citizens’ political thinking: “criminal” or “feckless”

⁷⁹ I am indebted here to Lukács’s (1971a [1923], 172) discussion of what he calls “status consciousness.”

migrants or racial minorities vs. law-abiding and responsible natives; oversensitive, “woke” “femi-Nazis” vs. “sensible”, “regular” people; rootless metropolitan “Southerners” vs. “salt of the earth” Northerners; free-riding and greedy “shirkers” or “slackers”⁸⁰ vs. law-abiding and hardworking natives, and so on. In each case, a frame is utilised which suggests that there is an important cleavage running *within* the membership of a community that should be highly relevant to political reasoning.⁸¹

How might these frames come to be utilised by members of the egalitarian constituency? One primary way in which divergent status frames can come to be utilised is through persuasive rhetorical interventions by members of the political elite. By “members of the political elite” I mean that relatively small number of individuals in every society who have the highest degree of influence over political affairs and play a leading role in determining how political power is exercised. Professional politicians and party staff, national newspaper

⁸⁰ For example, a significant proportion of members of the British public (47%) surveyed in a recent study believed that underperformance at work was a fairly or very important factor in determining which people lost their jobs during the pandemic, the implication being that if only these people had worked harder or had more ambition, they would have been able to avoid unemployment (Duffy et al 2021, 69). See also the discussion of the productive/parasitic divide in Fletcher and Redman (2022).

⁸¹ As Anne Phillips helpfully reminds us, widespread references to “equal status” and “equality before the law” in the advanced capitalist democracies do not provide sufficient support for the claim that these ideas are in any way endorsed by all citizens: “There is a flourishing market for pseudo-scientific ideas about innate gender differences or the racial distribution of intelligence, and once discredited eugenicist ideas are [now] more widely promoted” (Phillips 2021, 6).

and television journalists, influential columnists and talk show hosts, employees of important think tanks and political lobbying groups, and politically active members of the capitalist class, are all archetypal members of the political elite.⁸²

There is some evidence that suggests that humans tend to be subject to a partly unconscious psychological tendency to essentialize human groups and favour members of their fellow in-groups over members of out-groups in various ways (Kinder and Kam 2010). It thus follows that the generation of these divergent status frames are not *solely* the responsibility of a calculating political elite: internal psychological heuristics among the citizenry perhaps also play a role in their growth and spread. But it is plausible to see these partly affective, pre-rational exclusivist impulses as being sculpted, encouraged, and solidified by elite discourse and action. It is political elites that are often responsible for activating - or making salient - these latent exclusionary impulses to which many citizens are subject (Jardina and Piston 2021, 21). This occurs both when elite communications are fully persuasive,

⁸²Note that the political elite is considerably larger than the capitalist class taken on its own. For more on the definition of political elites as including all those who “rank toward the top of the (presumably closely intercorrelated) dimensions of interest, involvement, and influence in politics” see Putnam (1971, 651). There will of course be marginal cases that would require a more precise definition to settle. For example, we might ask: at what point exactly of exerting more influence over political life than the average citizen, does one become an elite? But there are also many clear-cut instances: Donald Trump and Rupert Murdoch and Ronald Reagan (for instance) are or were clearly members of the political elite on account of the combination of interest and involvement and influence they all had or have. By contrast, most citizens who only occasionally watch political news on television or vote in elections are clearly not members of the elite.

but – crucially – also when they just shift the realms of the normal or the permissible.⁸³

The following excerpt from the now infamous speech that launched Donald Trump's successful presidential bid in 2015 provides a recent example of how political discourse can be used to inculcate and strengthen divergent status frames: "When Mexico sends its people, they are not sending their best. They are not sending you [...] They are sending people that have lots of problems [...] They are bringing drugs; they are bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people." Referring to a criminal gang of undocumented migrants, Trump later also said "These aren't people, these are animals" (cited in Davis and Shear 2019, 26, 271).

Exaggerating the frequency of rare events in news media, political speeches, or campaign materials (or indeed entirely fabricating certain stories), are perhaps the most obvious ways in which political elites can communicate messages which serve to implant divergent status frames in others (Briant, Philo and Donald 2013).

Communications by influential members of the media which cover - for example - white supremacist groups or pseudoscientific accounts of racial IQ differences in a normalizing or legitimizing fashion (whether deliberately or not) can also contribute to and drive subscription to

⁸³ Allen Buchanan has recently presented a systematic and lengthy critique of the view that humans are "naturally" exclusivist, parochial or ethnocentric in their moral reasoning. What Buchanan calls "tribalism dogma" neglects that tribalistic moral responses are not innate but rather more often the result of elites "exploiting people's moral motivation in the service of immorality" (Buchanan 2020, 194).

these frames (Jardina and Piston 2021, 4-5).

The communication can equally take place more covertly through portrayals of disadvantaged social groups in popular culture, or even through legislation which has the effect of targeting and marginalizing certain social groups. Allen Buchanan provides the useful example of how state policy in the United States which systematically denied African Americans access to white collar work “created a social experience in which one only encountered African Americans doing menial jobs” (Buchanan 2020, 208). When elites draft and implement public policy which communicates and creates beliefs about the supposed failings or shortcomings of a particular social group in this way, this is also, on my account, an instance of elite-driven divergent status framing.⁸⁴

Trump’s remarks about Mexican immigrants fit into a long history of politicians finding ways to pit a supposedly law-abiding majority of the citizenry against an allegedly criminality-prone underclass. Hall et al. (1978) claim that the British Conservative party and its supporters helped engender a moral panic around a racialized, criminal working-class youth in British society in the aftermath of the collapse of the post-war consensus in the 1970s, to help preserve and

⁸⁴ I leave the question of exactly *why* political elites engage in these communicative acts with such frequency to empirical political scientists. It seems clear that among the many motivations usually at play are narrow self-interest in winning or continuing to exercise political power, advancing certain ideological aims with which the elites identify (like a less economically interventionist state), and simply that of enriching or further enriching oneself (Jardina and Piston 2021, 21).

expand their electoral coalition. Coded appeals to race were also often central to political discourse surrounding the (supposed) scourge of “inner city” criminality in the United States at around the same time (López 2014).

Many politicians and much of the media often also routinely invokes the idea of an indolent and undeserving minority freeriding on a hard-working majority through the form of social welfare fraud. This typically involves attempting to embed certain character archetypes - such as the “welfare queen” - in the popular political imagination (Goren 2021; Stanley 2015, 158-9). Whilst this attempt to implant a divergent status frame typically utilizes racially coded language and imagery, it may just evoke a generic group of unemployed and undeserving benefit-claimants that are pitted against a group of earnest workers (Jones 2012). It is also fairly common to see what has been termed “class-based anti-union rhetoric” (Kane and Newman 2017) in public discourse. Here, unionized workers - still usually highly disadvantaged relative to elites in terms of their access to social standing, political influence, and economic opportunity - are framed by some elites as undeserving of the above-average compensation they receive for their labour, and juxtaposed with a more normal, less greedy set of non-unionized workers, who are even more disadvantaged.

Sometimes this kind of communication will be an instance of dog-whistling. That is, it will take the form of a speech act which communicates a tacit, deniable derogatory message about a particular social group alongside its surface-level, explicit meaning which does not

feature anything overtly derogatory (Santana 2021). But the communication might equally be, as with the Trump examples (and many others), a much more explicit and overt slur.⁸⁵

Why are divergent status frames an issue, or problem, from the perspective of egalitarian transition?⁸⁶ There is empirical evidence that when elites repeatedly engage in communications of these kinds, this can often cause many members of the citizenry to identify to a greater and greater extent with the non-inferior grouping within this status frame, such that protecting and advancing the interests of this group (white, law-abiding native citizens, or non-university educated male citizens who live far from urban metropolises, for example) *becomes the overriding concern across more and more political issue areas* (Valentino et al. 2002; Goren 2021). When negative elite portrayals of certain social groups as threatening social stability or dominant social norms through their parasitic or otherwise irresponsible behaviour are repeatedly considered true to life by citizens, frames are strengthened which encourage these citizens to understand greater and greater

⁸⁵Jennifer Saul draws our attention to how overtly bigoted elite communications of this sort are typically accompanied by what she terms “figleaves”: “additional utterances that provide just enough cover” for the slur (Saul 2017, 97). For instance, elites might deny that the communication really constitutes a slur against the group in question, assert that they are friends with members of that group, attack others for making similar slurs, or have the slur itself be communicated by someone from the social group that is being painted in a negative light (Saul 2017, 103-107).

⁸⁶ There are certainly other reasons to object to the existence of these frames, that are not reducible to their role as transitional obstacles, such as the way that the deployment of these frames seems to demonstrate a failure to extend equal concern and respect to all citizens. But I do not discuss these here.

aspects of political life through the prism of this frame (Lakoff 2009, 73).

For example, elite communications of the above sort may well result in some citizens becoming considerably less likely to be motivated to support calls for universal public provision of certain benefits and the guaranteeing of certain social and economic rights for all. The significance of these so-called “other-oriented” concerns - such as affinity for the poorest section of society - in determining support (or a lack thereof) for redistribution and other progressive public policies often central to accounts of what social justice requires, is now well established in the empirical literature (Cavaillé and Trump 2015). Discouraging citizens from recognizing the commonalities between their own situation and that of othered individuals, can even make them more likely to support political efforts to maintain and worsen the position of these disadvantaged others.

Communications of this sort can also often make the kinds of social cleavages most amenable to rectifying an unjust economic structure less salient. They cause members of social groups who share interests in tackling economic injustice to fight among themselves, rather than together against their common oppressors. Direct attempts to raise class consciousness among those members of the egalitarian constituency who subscribe to such frames are highly unlikely to be successful because these agents are so cognisant of (supposedly) crucially important differences between themselves and other members of the economically disadvantaged that they will be unable to

sufficiently buy into class-conscious attempts at persuasion.⁸⁷

Additionally, possession of divergent status frames among members of the egalitarian constituency also has the effect of providing a kind of psychological “benefit” or “bonus” that can make the economically disadvantaged feel less dissatisfied with their situation. As Rahel Jaeggi notes, divergent status frames can sometimes function as “a means to compensate [...] workers in an extra-economic sphere” and thus work as a kind of “consolation prize” for economic inequality (Fraser and Jaeggi 2018, 215).

As Charles W. Mills notes with reference specifically to a white vs. black divergent status frame, there is a kind of psychological *“capital in whiteness”* which white workers can derive, despite lacking other kinds of goods (Mills 2003, 165; cf. Du Bois 1964 [1935], 700ff.). Whilst white members of the working class may only be “junior partners” in the project of racial domination, they still nonetheless retain a kind of psychological privilege that to some extent compensates them for their economic grievances and makes them feel like a less urgent issue (Mills 2003, 166). Castles and Kosack, similarly, also discuss one negative effect of possessing a migrant-native divergent status frame being that it enables native workers to see themselves as “superior to the unskilled immigrant workers” (Castles and Kosack 1972, 17), and thus

⁸⁷ Cedric Robinson is perhaps the most important and influential proponent of the thesis that capitalist inequality and oppression has benefited from identity-based forms of oppression. In one important essay, he writes that racism and sexism have often provided “the means for the ascent to and preservation of power for elitists” (Robinson 2019 [1990], 152).

able to look down at others and feel good about their own position.⁸⁸

It should thus be relatively clear why possession of a divergent status frame constitutes an obstacle to the emergence of class consciousness. I now turn to one available form of political activity well-suited, in my view, to the disruption of these frames, and the obstacle they pose to class consciousness-raising: left populism.

4.2 Disruptive discourse: the case of left populism

Populism, following Ernesto Laclau's influential account, can be understood as "a specific mode of articulation": that is, as a particular *style* of political messaging (Laclau 2005, 44; cf. Mouffe 2018).⁸⁹ A populist agent uses political communication of all kinds (political speeches, campaign materials like posters and manifestos, and responses to lines of questioning from journalists) to continuously draw attention to what Laclau calls a "dichotomization of the social space into two antagonistic camps", an "us" and "them", with one part of the citizenry belonging to the first, very small camp, and the vast bulk belonging to the other (Laclau 2005, 202).

⁸⁸ Marx's discussion of English proletarian workers also contains a similar point: "In relation to the Irish worker he *[sic]* regards himself as a member of the *ruling* nation" (Marx 1975 [1870]).

⁸⁹Given the explosion in academic research on populism, many other approaches to defining populism are of course available, such as the so-called "thin ideology" approach (e.g., Stanley 2008). I do not claim that regardless of the phenomenon being discussed or the question being asked, that the populism-as-discursive-strategy approach I deploy here is always the most fitting, only that this is a useful way to understand these matters when discussing solutions to the politics of divergent status frames.

Laclau offers the following non-exhaustive list of titles that populists might use to name these two groups: “the ‘regime’, the ‘oligarchy’, the ‘dominant groups’, and so on, for “the enemy”; [and] the ‘people’, the ‘nation’, the ‘silent majority’, and so on, for the oppressed underdog” (Laclau 2005, 87). The aim of the populist is to attribute various diverse social ills experienced by ‘the people’ to the actions or inactions of these ‘oligarchs’, thereby achieving the “symbolic unification” (Laclau 2005, 100) of members of the ‘underdog’ around common opposition to this small elite. Usually the speeches, actions, and general persona of one populist leader (who is thought to embody some of the best traits of the underdog population) is central to this symbolic unification, although there is no reason why it cannot involve two or more important political spokespersons rather than a single figurehead.

The populist style of framing can be used to communicate any specific kind of ideological message or content. For example, in one famous and prescient analysis, Thomas Frank (2004) documents the way Republican politicians in the US successfully presented their party as the voice of the persecuted common people, determined to tackle a self-serving elite, despite in fact using political power to further the material interests of the very richest group of Americans. What makes a populist discursive strategy “left” rather than “right”, therefore, is whether this strategy is utilized to try to advance the traditional ideological values of the left, “such as social justice, welfare-ism, internationalism, and, above all else, equality” (Venizelos and

Stavrakakis 2022, 4), rather than to advance the xenophobic and exclusionary projects of the nativist right.

Examples of left populist rhetoric thus include statements such as: “it’s high time the people of this country had a government at their service and not at the service of the privileged” (Errejón and Mouffe 2016, 138), promising to “make an economy and a democracy that works for all, and not just the powerful few” (Bernie Sanders, cited in Merica 2015) and condemning “a cosy cartel which rigs the system in favour of a few powerful and wealthy individuals and corporations” and claiming to rule instead for “[t]he nurse, the teacher, the small trader, the carer, the builder, [and] the office worker” (Jeremy Corbyn, cited in Stone 2017).⁹⁰

In what ways might a discursive strategy of left populism help to disrupt the hold of divergent status frames over many members of the egalitarian constituency? If a left populist force is successful in

⁹⁰ These quotes should just be read as examples of the broad kind of rhetorical intervention which counts as left populist: the claim here is certainly not that the figures from which these quotes are drawn have *consistently* pursued a left populist strategy. As Venizelos and Stavrakakis note, the populism of a given party, campaign or movement is always a matter of degree, as the emphasis placed on the dichotomization of the social space by a given populist actor can be more or less “*deep and intense*” (Venizelos and Stavrakakis 2022, 4). It can be central to every speech, every poster, every manifesto promise, and so on, or it can be referenced only occasionally, as part of a broader menu of rhetorical choices. An array of contemporary left actors can be seen as employing or having employed populism to different degrees, with Podemos and Syriza perhaps utilizing it most consistently in the years after their formation, and other actors like Corbyn and Sanders deploying it more sporadically. For useful assessments of the extent to which Jeremy Corbyn’s political interventions did and did not fit the populist template, see Maiguashca and Dean (2019) and Bennister, Worthy and Keith (2017).

repeatedly getting their progressive ‘people vs. elite’ message into the public sphere, and the public consciousness, what this can do, I claim, is to raise the relative salience of a more egalitarian, more inclusionary divide relative to the nativist, xenophobic or exclusionary divides central to divergent status frames. The idea is still to speak to the grievances of those sympathetic to such frames, and their demands for fairness, sovereignty and for protection of one kind or another from the whims of market forces, but to re-frame their perception of the *cause* of their grievances in a more egalitarian direction: as directed at the most economically and politically powerful strata in society, rather than marginalised and impoverished minorities.

Mouffe highlights, for instance, the “sentiment of being left behind” (2018, 23) and how this can be successfully re-articulated in a progressive fashion. Taken on its own, a feeling of being left behind is a very capacious sentiment that will often be widespread among the citizenry of a neoliberal state. A right-wing government or electoral force might draw on these sentiments to attempt to advance an exclusionary agenda, but the aim of the left populist is to “provide a different vocabulary in order to orientate” this very same grievance towards a *different* adversary (Mouffe 2018, 46-7). A member of the egalitarian constituency will be normalised into thinking that there is a crucial divide between their own experiences and those of the inferior “others” highlighted by their frame, but left populist rhetoric can challenge this divide, through its insistence that *all* members of the egalitarian constituency are underdogs relative to the elite and have a

shared interest in unseating this oligarchical force.

Sometimes this epistemic disruption of divergent status frames can be achieved just by left populists providing an alternative frame, without any direct reference to the right-populist alternative story, but sometimes it will be necessary and effective for left populists to tackle the dominant divergent status frames head-on, perhaps disputing their relevance, and claiming instead that the “real divide” within the nation is the one being articulated by the left populist. Ian Haney López (2019) has also recently provided some empirical evidence that appears to support the value of making interventions of this sort. Based on survey evidence, he argues that the most effective strategy for counteracting the unjust class war which the richest section of society continues to wage on the poorest in the US, is to continuously emphasize how sections of the political elite are cynically using divide-and-rule strategies to further enrich themselves. This can draw attention to the way that members of the egalitarian constituency might have been manipulated into utilising divergent status frames by highlighting the interests that this will often serve, and thus potentially cause those who deploy such frames to reconsider their accuracy.

To be clear, the claim in either case is not that a left populist rhetorical strategy will do enough by itself to fully persuade people out of their nativist or exclusionary ideas, but rather that the use of left populist discourses can at least *disrupt* the dominance of divergent status frames leading them to be less immediately and unquestioningly accepted by members of the egalitarian constituency, and thus creating

a more favourable environment for class consciousness raising proper.

There appears to be a presumptive case in favour of the potentially effectiveness of a strategy of left populism, then, but what about its moral permissibility? It will not be possible to convincingly counter all the potential worries that arise here in the space remaining. My claim in any case is not the strong one that a left populist rhetorical strategy will everywhere and always offer the very best chances of permissibly disrupting the possession of divergent status frames, but rather the weaker assertion that it ought to be among the menu of disruptive tactics that egalitarians should consider in the contemporary circumstances of the advanced capitalist democracies. Having said this, before moving on, I do want to briefly demonstrate how I think that two dominant strands of moral critiques of left populism miss their mark and do not in fact decisively count against a left populist strategy in the way they are sometimes thought to.

The first, and by far the most common set of claims which challenge the moral permissibility of left populism, focus on it as *a form of political rule* that – these critics claim – will likely have immoral anti-democratic consequences. This first line of attack argues that when populists, either left or right, come to power through winning elections, there is a risk that they will end up engaging in clientelism, the centralisation of executive power, the marginalisation of oppositional voices, and the restriction of civil liberties, thereby having a morally unacceptable “disfiguring impact on the institutions, the rule of law, and the division of powers, which comprise constitutional democracy”

(Urbinati 2019, 112). In support of this claim, these theorists usually point to compelling evidence that previous left populist governments (such as many of those in South America) have engaged in acts of this type (Cohen 2019, 402).

In my view, the risk of this outcome coming to pass clearly ought to be a factor in any all-things-considered assessment of the normative value of a given left populist intervention. Pointing to examples of specific left populists acting in these ways, however, doesn't establish, by itself, a "general" problem with left populism as a disruptive discursive strategy. As Bernard E. Harcourt has usefully pointed out, the values of *left* populism, assuming they are authentically held, actually "inherently resist [...] the [anti-democratic] dangers that the critics identify" (Harcourt 2020, 361-2). If the foundational normative principles of a left populist agent preclude the disfigurement of liberal democracy, it seems doubtful that this agent will inevitably fall prey to the defects of previously existing populist governments.

Pointing to specific instances of these anti-democratic consequences occurring in practice thus does not demonstrate that this is a permissibility risk that cannot be minimised or avoided entirely by sufficiently savvy and principled populist agents in the future. It seems like more of an open question - something that it is impossible to rule on categorically in the abstract – whether these anti-democratic risks are something that can be sufficiently minimized or not in a given instance. And from the perspective of egalitarian transition, at least, what I have termed left populism's potential disruptive ability also

ought to be a key factor in any such all-things-considered assessment, and it is not immediately clear that concerns about the risks of the former will always trump the potential value of the latter.

Of course, these critics can respond to this line of argument if they make the stronger claim that there is not just a (potentially defeasible) *risk* of anti-democratic rule, but a much weightier *certainty* of this taking place whenever a left populist agency comes to power. The critic is on much stronger ground if they can claim that these consequences are the *inevitable* or *necessary* consequences of deploying populist rhetoric. And sometimes, critics like Urbinati and Cohen do seem to suggest something like this line of argument, as in when Cohen claims that there is an “authoritarianism *inherent* in the strategy and logic of populism” that will apparently *always* be influential in left populist rule in one way or another (Cohen 2019, 392, emphasis added; cf. Arato 2019). But this point remains, to date, almost entirely unsubstantiated. The burden of proof, in my view, remains on authors like Cohen to demonstrate how a left-wing political force making a division between elites and underdogs central to all or many of their political interventions will *necessarily* lead to these undesirable consequences.

The second set of normative critiques of left populism as an oppositional political strategy claim that it undermines democracy and equal political rule *regardless of whether it gains power or not*. This latter line of attack claims that left populist interventions in the public realm erode democratic norms and support for democratic processes

by being either (a) openly “factional” - seeking to achieve “a preeminent power” for one part of the populous over another - (Urbinati 2019, 124; cf. Cohen 2019, 399-400) or (b) overly “divisive” or “uncivil” - working to divide “the country against itself” (Kelley 2018, 114). This is essentially another argument about an anti-democratic “externality” of deploying left populist rhetoric, but it is potentially a more devastating one, given that it does not rely on the left populist agency gaining power for these deleterious consequences to come about.

But this critique also seems to miss the mark in my view. What these critiques rely on for their force is an appeal to either (a) an ideal of “common good”, consensus-driven good-faith democratic reasoning or (b) an ideal of civil and “mindful [...] dialogue” (Kelley 2018, 121). They then charge left populist rhetoric of falling short of or departing from these ideals. But we can justifiably ask whether the ideals at the foundation of these criticisms are in fact reasonable or fair standards to hold electoralist rhetoric to under present (highly unjust) political conditions. Under highly inegalitarian neoliberal conditions, mindful and consensus-driven dialogue will tend to be very rare indeed, and *many* political figures aim (whether openly or covertly) to rule only for one part of the citizenry.

Similarly, whilst we can imagine circumstances in some perfectly just society where norms of civility play a valuable role in contributing to democratic stability, under present circumstances, they are often more likely to function as a means for securing the unjust advantages of society’s elites. As Iris Marion Young notes, for example, calls for civility

can be used to rule “out of order” [all] forms of political communication other than prepared statements calmly delivered” and “to locate some people as temperate and to label as ‘extreme’ others who use more demonstrative and disruptive means” (2000, 47; cf. Zerilli 2014).⁹¹ Thus, in my view, it might well be true that under *more favourable and just political conditions*, we would have cause to worry about the consequences of this rhetoric on democratic norms, but this criticism at least, doesn’t seem to have the weight, in my view, that these critics often attribute to it.

I thus conclude that left populism ought to be considered at least a potentially transitionally valuable form of action when it comes to the task of raising class consciousness: both effectively and potentially permissibly disrupting the kinds of frames which prevent the emergence of class consciousness.

4.3 What is a privatistic frame?

A privatistic frame is one that promotes general indifference or even antipathy towards broad questions of social organisation and civic participation, and a sole or near-sole focus instead on family life, consumption, leisure, and career advancement (Habermas 1992, 75;

⁹¹ Kelley claims at one point that Sanders ought to have engaged in “more accurate narratives”, that are “fairer representations of Western democracies” (Kelley 2018, 101). But she fails to point to any direct evidence of Sanders’s central diagnosis being inaccurate.

Habermas 1996, 78; Peterson 1984; Wright 2019, 134). An individual in the thrall of privatism, as Claus Offe summarizes, “sees *private* [...] life as the scene or appropriate context where his or her important concerns and interests can be pursued” (Offe 2006, 41). Another way to put this is that a privatistic individual favours what Habermas has called “the quiet bliss of homeyness” over the more chaotic and raucous political sphere (Habermas 1989, 159).⁹²

Clearly, not all citizens in a given polity orient themselves unreflectively in this way: many people’s epistemic frameworks assign a much more significant space for political affairs and political engagement. But in unjust societies, privatism is, I would suggest, often one of the key settled conceptual frameworks that many individuals use to think about and understand the world and their place in it. In most individuals, it manifests itself not as a conscious and ideologically committed rejection of political life, but rather as a relatively unreflective reliance on a framework of privatism. An exclusive or near-exclusive focus on private concerns among many citizens is part of the reason why we see substantial, and often growing levels of political disenchantment, disaffection, or disengagement throughout the advanced capitalist democracies. These dynamics are observable via

⁹² Privatism is thus very similar to what Alexis de Tocqueville famously described as “individualism.” de Tocqueville defines individualism as a “sentiment that disposes each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of his fellows and to withdraw to the side with his family and his friends; so that, after thus creating a small society for his own use, he willingly abandons the large society to itself” (de Tocqueville 2012 [1835], 882). See also White (2012, 137ff).

low and declining levels of: voter turnout, party membership, general political interest, and trust in politicians, parties, and democratic institutions among democratic publics (Stoker 2017, chapter 2). 19% of Americans, for instance, report *never* discussing a public issue (Jacobs, Cook and Carpini 2009, 38).

Of course, most individuals prioritize their own wellbeing and that of their family over the wellbeing of distant others. *Some* degree of moral partiality in this way is often taken to be perfectly rational and ethically justified (Scheffler 2011, 100). But privatism is distinct from this basic kind of reasonable partiality because it is a cognitive framework which promotes an *exclusive* or *near-exclusive* focus on narrow individual and family wellbeing. This sole or near-sole focus on private concerns might potentially be justified under conditions of social justice (although even here it is not clear that a socially just state could sustain itself with high degrees of such indifference). But when justice is not secured, and individuals suffer severe and debilitating forms of disadvantage, we have reason to morally object to a settled cognitive framework that promotes this indifference.⁹³

The question of what *causes* subscription to privatistic frames, of course, could fill a whole chapter of its own. The sociologist Jennifer Silva claims that it is constant exposure to economic precarity,

⁹³ I do not take a stance on the question of where the moral responsibility for this wrong lies. But I certainly reject a highly individualistic approach which would simply claim that everyone is ultimately personally responsible and blameworthy for their disengagement, as this ignores the many structural factors which incentivize a privatistic outlook, discussed in more detail below.

exploitation and negative experiences with various government institutions, that leads individuals to develop selves that are “detached from the social world” (Silva 2013, 98). Colin Hay (2007) suggests that the predominance of public policies of privatization and a more general denial of policy choice to the electorate is part of the source. Iris Marion Young, by contrast, focuses on the role that the “goal of a dream house” for one’s family can play in cultivating privatism (Young 1997, 143). Sensationalist, over-simplified, and hyper-partisan framing and reporting has also been linked to a withdrawal from political life (Offe 2006, 41). And Erik Olin Wright also makes the more general claim that a culture of “competitive individualism” - encouraged by the media, the advertising industry and amplified by the hollowing out of social safety nets - plays a key role in generating privatism (Wright 2019, 134).⁹⁴

Another plausible contributing factor is the prevalence of *deference* in the economic sphere. Citizens are often encouraged to accept what Elizabeth Anderson calls the “open-ended authority” of the manager over conditions in the workplace – such as what counts as fair pay, or an achievable and fair task for completion (Anderson 2017, 52).

⁹⁴ It also seems clear that part of the source of political privatism is the common individual desire to maintain what Mutz calls “interpersonal social harmony”, and to avoid the conflict and controversy often integral to the political realm (Mutz 2006, 107). But the claims by those debating the structural, political sources of privatism can be adjusted to accommodate this fact: it is still the presence of a culture of competitive individualism, and so on, that *amplifies* these pre-existing individual psychological desires and causes them to *predominate* in individual thinking. For a sceptical view about the significance of an active desire to avoid cross-cutting exposure in determining the shape of political discussion networks, see Minozzi et. al (2020).

Most of us take for granted this social hierarchy as a mere fact of life: we do not feel affronted when we are not consulted by our employers or managers about the best way to perform important tasks and tend to accept their diktats about everything from the speed at which we must perform work tasks to the hours we must spend on paid labour. Not having any, or very many, experiences of being a legitimate, autonomous authority over some economic sphere in the division of labour can plausibly lead one to doubt that one is a legitimate authority when it comes to political matters, too.

Arguably it is not just the open-ended authority of *managers* that it is currently socially appropriate to accept, even welcome. There are a whole host of scenarios in which passively deferring to authority is widely considered normal and appropriate behaviour. For example, decisions about what percentage of, when and where to invest the productive surplus are commonly taken by CEOs, investors, and financial and business elites, and this is accepted as appropriate even when these decisions have far-reaching consequences, such as over the character, quality and quantity of employment, housing, and public services in any given area. Citizens are thus also accustomed to accepting as a fact of life the way corporations and investors can move their capital as they wish, potentially upending an entire town or city's economic prospects, impacting unemployment levels and available housing. Similarly, many of us also tend to accept the outcome of a competitive labour market processes as the wise and fair result of a meritocratic society. Plausibly, then, becoming habituated to defer in all

these ways tends to normalise individuals to deferring in other spheres, such as the political one. In essence, the deference that is integral to capitalism's economic arena will often bleed out into the political one, contributing to a culture of privatism.⁹⁵

Why might the widespread deployment of this frame be an issue, from the perspective of egalitarian transition?⁹⁶ Subscription to a privatistic frame plays an important role in creating a generally inhospitable environment for the remedying of social injustice and contributes to the durability of unjust institutional arrangements. Privatism plays this role by obscuring for the individuals who subscribe to it certain significant aspects of the political world. For example, if an individual utilizes a cognitive framework of privatism, this tends to obscure from view how they and others are being disadvantaged by social structures such as the class structure. Individuals in the thrall of privatism will often not think of their ability to access medical care, education, housing, or well-paid and meaningful jobs with appropriate hours, as being in any fundamental way the *product* of contingent laws or individuals, like landlords or employers. In short, they often do not tend to consider the problems in their own lives to be particularly

⁹⁵ This argument is essentially the inverse of the so-called “spill over thesis” about the positive civic engagement consequences of more widespread workplace democracy originally argued for by Carol Pateman (1970). See also the discussion in O’Neill and White (2018) and Geurkink, Akkerman and Sluiter (2022).

⁹⁶ As with my discussion of divergent status frames above, there are certainly other reasons to object to the existence of these frames, that are not reducible to their role as transitional obstacles, but I do not discuss these here.

political ones. On the contrary, a sole or near-sole focus on private concerns tends to encourage a narrow view of individual responsibility for one's own welfare. This encourages a sense that the predicaments they face are just the way things are or must be. Individuals encouraged to think solely through the lens of their own narrow private life are also more liable to consider the wrongs done to them to be mere random misfortunes, or perhaps the result of some particularly evil wrongdoer, rather than as a reliable outcome of a structural political process (Jugov and Ypi 2019, 15).

Being in the thrall of privatism also often tends to obscure from view at least some of the activities of economic and political elites. Individuals become uninterested in the actions of the most powerful members of society, who exert huge and unchecked influence over the shape of collective life. As citizens become mere passive client-users of paternalistically provided services, they come to be increasingly ignorant regarding whether elites are operating in their best interests (Habermas 1996, 78; 503). Or, where attention is paid by citizens to elite manoeuvrings, this is done so by citizens acting as passive viewers of media and political *spectacle*, rather than as citizens capable of acting in ways to really check their influence (Kohn 2008, 479).

Privatism also encourages individuals to possess an indifference to those outside their private circle, making it difficult for individuals to think clearly about how other citizens are faring in political life, and to factor considerations about their wellbeing, and of the common good more generally, into their everyday reasoning. Even when individuals

do participate in political acts, such as voting, individuals in the thrall of privatism usually choose the party or politician that they think will advance their own self-interest, rather than acting out of concern for the public good (Habermas 1996, 506).

Privatism makes it difficult for individuals to see political participation and collective political activity as a feasible or desirable route to achieve certain changes. As Offe puts it, participation “is not held to be ‘worth the effort’, because what counts is seen to be outside of politics anyway, and political institutions [...] are at best dubious as to their worthiness of the citizens’ confidence” (Offe 2006, 41). Sometimes, an individuals’ perception that political activity is infeasible or undesirable will be warranted by the best available evidence: sometimes it just *is* the case that even collective political participation will be relatively ineffectual, perhaps because of highly unequal power differentials. But a generalized perception of this kind obscures from individuals the potential significance of political activity in situations where this is not the case, and where participation could make a real difference.

Finally, political privatism also often encourages a kind of political hopelessness or political despondency. In the most common case, political hopelessness involves desiring or wishing that a political change of some kind would come about but possessing a belief that its coming to pass is impossible, or at least extremely improbable. It also involves not relying on the desired outcome coming to pass in one’s plans about what to do, not possessing positive feelings anticipating its

arrival and not spending time imagining or fantasising about its realisation (Bloeser and Stahl 2017; Martin 2014). Another type of political hopelessness, but one which I take to be much less prevalent, involves having no desires or wishes for political changes to come about in the first place. Whilst less common, this remains an important species of hopelessness, especially among those at the very bottom of the class structure. As Will Atkinson has noted, for instance, there is a “differential tendency attached to class position to feel one even *has* a political position or is *entitled* to an opinion” in the first place (Atkinson 2017, 65). Thus, many of those who are worst-off under contemporary economic conditions are also those among whom strong beliefs about the kinds of changes they would like to see are the least present.⁹⁷

It is for all of these reasons that egalitarians ought to consider the possession of privatistic frames among members of the egalitarian constituency as an obstacle to raising class consciousness: individuals in the thrall of this frame simply do not share the basic presuppositions about the potential good of political participation or the political causes of many individual problems that are necessary for the complex of

⁹⁷ The video documentary series “Anywhere But Westminster” by *Guardian* journalists John Harris and John Domokos, provides a further good example of this. Interviewees often display a deep-seated feeling of scepticism regarding the possibility of real, substantial change that can improve their lives. One familiar refrain is: “what can we do?”, and another reports that “we’ve lost all control”, whilst the claim that voting “doesn’t ever work out the way most of us want it to” is another common, exasperated expression, as so many clearly feel that political representatives “don’t take notice of any normal working person” (Cranston 2018). For further empirical support for the finding that many working class people currently feel they have no say over their governments, see Rennwald and Pontusson (2022).

beliefs and desires central to class consciousness to appear a plausible or desirable frame. I now turn to one available form of political activity well-suited, in my view, to the disruption of this frame, and the obstacle it poses: democratic municipalism.

4.4 Disruptive action: the case of democratic municipalism

The term “municipality” - derived from the Latin *municipium* - refers to a geographic subdivision within a nation state that governs some of its own affairs (Hoad 1996, 304-5). Sometimes this subdivision will be a major city, and at other times, it will be a much smaller town, or even one borough or ward within a larger city: this depends on the extent and nature of political devolution in the country in question. But the basic idea is that it is a term which refers to some organised locality or community within a state that exercises at least a degree of self-government, such as over matters of public transport or waste disposal.

I claim that we can understand democratic municipalist agents as: democratic associations of local residents that both build and empower neighbourhood assemblies and make improvements to the municipal provision of basic goods and services (Bookchin 2006, 107; Bookchin 1992, 238; Cumbers and Traill 2021, 254; Kioupkiolis 2019, 106). This means there are three central defining features of this agential form. First, there must be several local residents that share the twin aims of *democratising* municipal governance to some extent on the

one hand and *improving* the municipal provision of certain goods and services on the other. This first aim entails wishing to shift the locus of power within a given municipality somewhat, away from a traditional hierarchical city council and its bureaucrats and rooting it in local residents themselves. And the second entails wishing to enhance what Murray Bookchin calls “access to the resources that make daily life tolerable”, such as “shelter or adequate park space and transportation” (2006, 114).

Different democratic municipalist agents will clearly disagree about exactly what “improving” the provision of certain basic goods and services of this kind will look like, and what precise form the increased influence of local residents over municipal decision-making ought to take. But here are some examples: *Barcelona en Comú (BenC)*, a democratic municipalist collective in Barcelona, Spain, have, since winning the city’s mayoralty: launched a municipally owned renewable energy company, which supplies electricity to all city council buildings, as well as to a growing number of citizens’ homes, vastly increased the quantity of Barcelona’s affordable housing stock (Bookchin and Colau 2019; Rubio-Pueyo 2017; Russell and Reyes 2017) and created a series of “superblocks”, which cut through-traffic in congested, highly polluted areas of the city by heavily restricting car use and opening up roads for novel green space, cycle lanes and public squares (Burgen 2020).

Cooperation Jackson, in Jackson, Mississippi, by contrast, have launched a “community land trust” to keep house prices affordable for local residents and business owners (Sheffield 2019) and several small

cooperatives and an urban farming group, which sells produce to the local community. And *Ciudad Futura* in Rosario, Argentina, have established a small dairy farm cooperative and a food share program (Rushton 2018; Switzer 2018).

Second, the individuals sharing these aims must together be involved in a formal *and democratic* association of some kind. This condition leaves the exact nature of the rules and procedures governing the association largely unspecified.⁹⁸ But there must be rules and procedures of some kind governing the association that ensure that those occupying positions of authority within the association are accountable in various ways to other members of the group.

Finally, this association must make regular efforts to *both* control or maintain control of municipal decision-making institutions *and* to build and empower neighbourhood assemblies, to advance its shared aims. Pursuing this dual set of actions is arguably the crucial defining feature of democratic municipalism. Traditional political parties, as White and Ypi recognise, can also seek to enter decision-making institutions at a “local [...] or federal” level and make improvements to the provision of goods and services (White and Ypi 2016, 201). But formal associations pursuing only this first act do not

⁹⁸ Some municipalist agents, like *Barcelona en Comú*, prefer to refer to themselves as horizontalist “citizen platforms”, to differentiate themselves from what they consider more hierarchical and professionalised local parties (Thompson 2021, 326-328; Forman, Gran and Van Outryve 2020, 136). But other instances of democratic municipalism have been undertaken by (democratically run) parties (Brownill 1988; Kohn 2003).

count as democratic municipalist agents, on my definition.⁹⁹

For instance, *BenC* have also organised bi-weekly neighbourhood assemblies in each district of Barcelona since their inception. These regular meetings discuss issues of concern for residents and steps the platform ought to take to alleviate them (Islar and Irgil 2018; Rubio-Pueyo 2017). The *Jackson People's Assembly* in Jackson would be a further example (Guttenplan 2017; Akuno 2017). And in Rosario, *Ciudad Futura* have opened a cultural centre, which hosts democratic assemblies for local residents (Rushton 2018).

We can thus distinguish this form of democratic municipalism from some other famous earlier instances of radical municipal politics, such as “Red Vienna” and the “gas and water socialism” associated with Fabianism in early twentieth century Britain. The important contrast that marks at least most of these earlier experiments in municipal politics from the examples featured above is that these early experiments tended to be much more top-down, and generally lacked widespread popular participation (Gruber 1991, 185; Gyford 1985, 10; Radford 2003, 890). Democratic municipalism is distinct from this model of municipal politics because it is concerned with “contesting not only the *functions* of local government [...] but the *forms* through which we make collective decisions about ourselves and our territories”

⁹⁹ What distinguishes municipalist managerial radicalism from *democratic* municipalism, Bookchin notes, is that the latter set of agents either use “what real power their offices confer to legislate popular assemblies into existence” or grant existing neighbourhood assemblies greater influence over municipal decision-making (2006, 115; Biehl 2015, 147).

(Russell 2020, 99).¹⁰⁰

Because democratic municipalist agents are seeking not merely to influence decision-making institutions from the outside, but to actively *control* them, they are, as should be clear, fairly distinct from traditional community organising. Rather than solely following a traditional community organising model on the one hand or concentrating only on delivering an electoral platform in a bureaucratic manner on the other, democratic municipalism involves instead a synergy of sorts between bottom-up and top-down political activity. It focuses on building democratic participation, but it also sees gaining office and passing changes at the municipal level as a way to build and sustain this participation. The idea is to not just remain *outside* local institutions, as on the traditional community organising model, but also “to occupy the institutions too”, as Russell and Reyes (2017) have put it.

¹⁰⁰ Of course, it is not as if this distinguishes it from *every historic form* of municipal politics. One might highlight for instance, as early examples of the kind of bottom-up, democratic municipalism I have in mind here, the radical-democratic model of Italian municipalism in the 19th and 20th centuries (Kohn 2003), the UK’s Greater London Council and its pioneering use of “popular planning” in the 1970s (Brownill 1988; Hatherley 2020, 128-132) as well as the experiments in Porto Alegre, Brazil with participatory budgeting in the 1990s (Baiocchi 2005). Commentators sometimes include recent municipal political experiments that map very closely onto these older forms of top-down municipalism and lack a stress on local democratic assemblies – such as recent transatlantic experiments with “progressive procurement” (Guinan and O’Neill 2020) – as part of the New Municipalism, but this is contested (Russell 2020; Thompson 2021). These experiments with progressive procurement, as the initiator of one famous example in Preston, in the UK, admits, are much more top down, with far less local democratic engagement, than the other movements associated with this new wave of municipal activity (Hopkins 2019), and are thus not quite what I have in mind here.

Why might democratic municipalist practice play an important role in disrupting privatism among members of the egalitarian constituency? The key to my argument is to recognise that despite not considering themselves to be “political” animals in any way, many members of the egalitarian constituency that subscribe to privatistic frames still nonetheless possess many grievances that are concentrated at the level of the neighbourhood or municipality. Murray Bookchin lists as examples of potentially weighty neighbourhood grievances: “shortcomings in public services and education [...] the integrity of [...] supplies of food, air, and water”, as well as issues of safety, housing, congestion, recreation, loneliness and the erosion of local community (Bookchin 2015, 175-6).¹⁰¹

There is evidence, for example, that many people feel a fairly deep level of attachment to the neighbourhood in which they live. Individuals often possess a desire to improve the parts of the area of which they are fond, and to generally see their neighbourhood flourish (Lewicka 2011). And there is also emerging evidence that this attachment to place, this embeddedness in a particular locale, often plays a significant role in determining citizens’ political behaviour, with one’s experiences at the local level and the observations one makes there, having been shown to play a key role in structuring political

¹⁰¹ Other thinkers that highlight the potential value and political importance of highly localized political activism include Axel Honneth (2017, 102-3) and Erik Olin Wright (2019, 100). I discuss some of the strengths and limitations of Bookchin’s thought on democratic municipalism in Shelley (forthcoming).

views and behaviour more generally (Ethington and McDaniel 2007).

Perceiving a declining number of “socio-cultural hubs” like local pubs and social clubs in one’s area, for instance, has been found to lead to an increased sense of isolation, social marginality, status anxiety, and declining cultural and community identity among residents. This in turn increases the propensity of these individuals to offer electoral support to the radical right (Bolet 2021; Osuna, Kiefel and Katsouyanni 2021).

Additionally, Hahrie Han has highlighted the centrality of an individuals’ commitments to overcoming the “problems in their own lives” and those of others close to them, in determining their political behaviour (2009, 3). Chief among these issues, for Han, are the inadequacy of “the schools their children attend or the health care their parents receive” (2009, 70) in their immediate lived environment (cf. Nuamah and Ogorzalek 2021). Much of these findings also seem to be confirmed in the way in which democratic municipal political organisers have had success in reaching many of those that feel alienated by and do not identify with more traditional national and international forms of political participation: some of these individuals often even taking up leadership roles within the local movements (Russell 2019).

On the basis of this evidence, my claim is that both changing policies in ways beneficial to local residents (perhaps the provision of social housing, or the revitalization of public transport, or the building of a community centre) and providing opportunities for residents to participate in political deliberation (through neighbourhood

assemblies) can effectively disrupt privatistic frames, and in particular can reduce understandable scepticism about the impossibility or undesirability of change that is often central to privatism.

But even if there might be ways in which a democratic municipalist practice can effectively disrupt the hold of privatism, might there be countervailing moral considerations that should cause us to refrain from deploying this strategy? One common worry with localised forms of political practice of all kinds is that they have the unintended side-effect of bolstering a kind of *toxic localism*: a kind of insular political mentality that fortifies opposition to all or at least some individuals and social groups coded as “outsiders” (or “others”) and thereby potentially delaying the kinds of national, and indeed global changes many think required to secure justice for all, distracting people from larger political questions and resulting in a turning inwards. Might encouraging greater engagement with local issues make it harder to deal with pressing international issues, such as migration, international tax evasion and capital mobility, nuclear disarmament, global inequality and poverty, and climate change, for example? This is a worry that might cause us to reject the potential disruptive value of democratic municipalism. But as with the worries about left populism I considered above, I think it is misplaced.

There is an undeniable association between localist sentiments *of a certain kind* and a dislike and rejection of the distant and the strange. But here I follow Margaret Kohn in claiming that it is a mistake to associate localist sentiments *per se* with a parochial “rejection of the

outside world" (Kohn 2003, 140). Thus, whilst the threat of a descent into toxic localism remains in some ways an ever-present one, localism - as Bookchin has noted - should never be interpreted to *necessarily* mean groups "withdrawing into themselves at the expense of wider areas of human consociation" (Bookchin 1992, 297). There is no *necessary* connection between particularity, in other words, and *exclusivism*.

Just because democratic municipalism draws on local grievances as the raw material for its politics, does not mean that the orientation of municipal politics must remain inward-looking and localist. It is not true that just because democratic municipalist actors operate *primarily* at the local scale, that they must *remain isolated there*. Many instances of democratic municipalism, for instance, have placed a firm stress in their political activity on cultivating ties and bonds with other actors across the globe and on raising public awareness about more *national* and *global* injustices.

Here are just two examples. Municipalists in Barcelona and elsewhere have played a pivotal role in challenging restrictive and punitive migration and asylum policies by serving as "Refuge Cities" for refugees and migrants (Agustín 2020; Rubio-Pueyo 2017). Others have noted that *BenC* assisted migrant street vendors in the creation of "a worker cooperative called *Diomcoop* with its own fashion line" (Forman, Gran and Van Outryve, 2020: 138). Despite their highly localist origins, these are all perfect examples of what Ypi refers to as grassroots political actors raising "public awareness" about injustices

that are global in scope (2012, 170).¹⁰²

Of course, it is still highly possible that even a very well-meaning municipal political activist group could inadvertently or accidentally bolster toxic localism, despite its best efforts. A group adequately organised around and living up to shared moral principles of this kind will not, as Schwartz has put it, evolve “inexorably or teleologically” but rather is most likely to occur “through democratic contestation” among group members (Schwartz 2009). But this is why it seems so important that these municipalist groups place an important emphasis on democratic deliberation and inclusion. The kinds of disagreement and discussion this will lead to can be productive in ensuring the local group remains sufficiently principled, centring moral principles and de-centring the more exclusivist, particularistic potential bases of group identity. I thus conclude that there is at least nothing *necessarily* impermissibly reactionary or parochial about local political organisations: mostly what matters is whether principled egalitarian agents are present in them to steer them in a way that forefronts broader national and global issues.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter examined two sets of thought patterns that I think are

¹⁰² For more on the historical formation of what is often called the ‘Urban Internationale’ or ‘localist internationalism’, see Saunier (2001) and Stromquist (2009).

habitually deployed by many members of the egalitarian constituency in the advanced capitalist democracies and that I claim work to create a hostile environment for class consciousness-raising. The two frames often possessed by members of the egalitarian constituency that I claimed must be disrupted by consciousness-raisers under present political circumstances are what I call *divergent status* frames on the one hand (which distribute some members of a community into a social grouping of inferior or lesser status to “regular” members of the community), and *privatistic* frames on the other (which promote general indifference or even antipathy towards broad questions of social organisation and civic participation, and a sole or near-sole focus instead on family life, consumption, leisure, and career advancement). I claimed that when individuals are in the thrall of divergent status or *privatistic* frames, they are highly unlikely to be receptive to attempts to inculcate a class-conscious frame or heuristic, as there is no substantive overlap between this kind of thinking and these individual’s existing set of habitual thought patterns.

The chapter also highlighted two specific forms of political practice through which these frames might be effectively and permissibly disrupted. The first practice I highlighted was left populism, understood as a rhetorical strategy of drawing attention to the existence of two antagonistic camps within the citizenry which aims to advance the traditional ideological values of the left. The second practice I highlighted was democratic municipalism, understood as a democratic association of local residents that both builds and

empowers neighbourhood assemblies and makes improvements to the municipal provision of basic goods and services. I argued that both of these practices ought to be considered desirable means for the creation of the kind of epistemic opening in which class conscious beliefs can take hold among members of the egalitarian constituency at a later date. What these practices do is aid in the creation of a *more favourable background environment* against which the more involved stages of consciousness-raising that I will now move on to discuss, can take place.

The Transitional Value of Organising Conversations

This chapter focuses on the second stage of my three-part model of consciousness-raising: the generation of what I call *participatory intent*, and the transitionally valuable role that organising conversations can play in creating and maintaining it. Organising conversations are structured, one-on-one discussions in which activists aim to isolate a citizen's grievances, and then share relevant information to persuade them that engaging in political participation of some kind is the best way to alleviate their complaints. After describing what this practice involves, I compare it to several adjacent, but usually distinct forms of verbal political communication. The first is traditional neighbourhood canvassing, a practice which takes place when political activists arrive unannounced on strangers' doorsteps during door-to-door neighbourhood walks. The second is everyday political talk, the kinds of quotidian political discussion which take place in the home and elsewhere.

I then make a case for the practice as a central means for effectively generating participatory intent: I draw on evidence which demonstrates that structured interpersonal political conversations can result in a relatively long-lasting persuasion effect and highlight several conditions which – if present – can maximize the prospects for the generation of participatory intent taking place. Finally, I examine how activists conducting these conversations can avoid what I call various

“impermissibility risks”, by refraining from implanting false or misleading beliefs in their interlocutors.

5.1 The nature of organising conversations

As I have said, organising conversations (sometimes also called “one-on-ones” or “one-to-ones”) are structured, one-on-one discussions in which activists aim to isolate a citizen’s grievances, and then share relevant information to persuade them that engaging in political participation of some kind is the best way to alleviate their complaints (Lopez 2004, 92; McAlevey 2016, 36-7; Richman 2020, 176). This quotation, from Shen, a fast-food worker and trade union shop steward who helped organise the very first ‘McStrike’ in the UK in 2017, gives a very good sense of the kind of conversation I have in mind:

I know it sounds really small and stupid, but no one normally comes up to you and just asks, “how are you doing? Is your money situation OK, is your living situation OK, are you getting by, what’s happening?” [...] People will talk to you for hours if you ask them that, and if you show them that you really care. And then the next stage is to say, “OK, what are you going to do about it? Are you going to live on low pay, are you going to be bullied by this manager every day, are you going to live like this for as

long as they make you live like this, or are you going to stand up?" [...] we all like to think we would fight back if we were in the shit, if those around us were in the shit. And so I'd say, "Well we're in the shit now, so let's do something now." You can pass out as many leaflets as you want, you can put up as many posters as you want, but unless you're actually in the workplace, having these conversations, then nothing is going to happen (cited in Shenker 2020, 85-6)

Organising conversations, like those conducted by Shen, are an activist practice that typically features two distinct components: isolation, followed by information-sharing aimed at persuasion. What do each of these two structured stages normally entail? An activist typically begins an organising conversation by using open-ended questioning and active listening to learn about the experiences of their interlocutor and identify a political issue or grievance that is particularly important to them (Brooks, Singh and Winslow 2018, 27; McElroy 2019, 333; Zacharias-Walsh 2016, 115). Schutz and Sandy advise that "a common rule of thumb" is for the activist to aim to spend around 20% of the length of the conversation *asking* questions about these grievances and about 80% of it *listening* to the responses (Schutz and Sandy 2011, 200). This stage is thus not about determining in advance what the most important topics of the organising conversation should be, and then engaging in what Pyles has called "ideological ranting" (Pyles

2009, 89). Rather, it is about endeavouring to listen carefully to what the interlocutor has to say and offering highly tailored responses based on this.

On the account I develop here, to have a *grievance* means simply to possess a complaint of some sort against the social world. A grievance need not necessarily only involve possessing vague feelings that something in the world is unfair or wrong or harmful and ought to end. These feelings can - and often will - also be accompanied by a provisional *analysis* of the nature of this complaint, including an at least partially accurate awareness of its causes. Additionally, the grievance also need not necessarily be a narrowly individualistic complaint: it could be a grievance related to a cause one identifies with or has taken up on another's behalf, despite it not directly affecting oneself in any narrow sense. The grievances one encounters when engaging in organising conversations at the local or workplace level are often likely to be highly specific and may even appear banal and somewhat apolitical at first glance. Here are some examples of the kinds of thing I have in mind: "there used to be a bus that my child took to school every day, but the council has cut the service", "my manager always shows favouritism when assigning shifts", "there used to be a real sense of community on this street/in this office", and so on.

The activist's goal in this initial isolation stage, as Stout has described it, is to get their interlocutor expressing what will typically be their "jumble of concerns and emotions" through "stories about what is going on around them" (Stout 2010, 151). For example, a trade union

shop steward might approach a fellow worker and attempt to elicit from them their views on the most frustrating current aspect of their experience at work, or the one change they would make if they were able to do so.¹⁰³

Alone, this first step would amount to little more than what Brooks, Singh and Winslow call “a gripe session” (Brooks, Singh and Winslow 2018, 32). So, what is crucial to the structure of a successful organising conversation is that after isolating some concrete grievance, the activist then attempts to *persuade* their interlocutor or discussion partner (I will use the terms interchangeably) to undertake a course of action that they believe will help to solve their complaint. The ultimate aim of the organising conversation then, is not simply to clarify the nature of the political grievances important to a particular citizen, but to generate a form of *participatory intent*, that is, a relatively robust intention to undertake some further form of political activity related to this grievance after the conversation ends. The activist is aiming to bring about in their interlocutor a particular intention: to induce them to be actively motivated to participate in a political action of some

¹⁰³ If the organising conversation is taking place with a complete stranger, beginning immediately with these questions is unlikely to elicit useful responses, so in these instances a prior step is also typically required in which the activist tries to minimize the strangeness of the interaction and establish trust, by identifying themselves and attempting to strike up a connection of some kind (Nielsen 2012, 76). Some organisers always feature this as a distinct prior step that the activist ought to take prior to engaging in isolation, terming it *showtime* (McAlevy 2019).

specific kind in the future.¹⁰⁴

Zheng writes that “[w]hat is crucial about making asks is *meeting people where they are*, no matter where that is, and pulling them just a bit further” (Zheng 2018, 15). So, the precise shape of the participatory intent generated by the activist in the organising conversation is going to differ depending on the pre-existing attitudes and experiences of their interlocutor. Persuasion should be calibrated in each case to what it is reasonable to expect the interlocutor to commit to. The commitment could be just to a follow-up conversation, or to signing a petition or attending a union or party or movement meeting or educational event, for instance. But it could also be a commitment to become considerably more involved, perhaps taking up a leadership role or conducting their own organising conversations with others (Brooks, Singh and Winslow 2018, 28; McElroy 2019, 333).

To be clear, the ultimate aim of the activist initiating the organising conversation is to generate a participatory intent of some kind in their interlocutor, and *not* to generate the sophisticated complex of beliefs and desires about power hierarchies in economic production that I have claimed are central to class consciousness. The interlocutor

¹⁰⁴ An “intention”, as opposed to a fully-fledged commitment, usually denotes a motivation that is fairly weak or shallow, that is, one where you are prepared to do relatively “little to see to it that” it “persists” (Calhoun 2009, 618), and are only “prepared to weather [a narrow range of] circumstantial and informational changes”, such as a change of heart, or conflicting inclinations or desires (Calhoun 2009, 620) before abandoning it. It would be unrealistic to expect an activist to be so persuasive during one or several of these interactions that they foster a more fully-fledged commitment. But I claim that the generation of a weaker, less robust intention will sometimes be within their reach.

need only believe that participating in some specific form of action in the immediate to near future increases the chances of remediating some specific grievance they have and *may not even have any beliefs about class at all* at this stage of the consciousness-raising process.

The generation of participatory intent in organising conversations is ultimately achieved by an activist successfully “making an ask”: persuading their interlocutor of the desirability of committing to some concrete form of political participation to take a step towards alleviating the grievance under discussion. A successful organising conversation thus ends with the interlocutor making a pledge or promise of some kind to the activist about incorporating some form of political participation into their future plans. If making a successful ask is the ultimate goal of an organising conversation, what comes between the initial isolation stage and the activist’s hoped-for end point? Making an ask is usually preceded by several distinct persuasive steps, each of which primarily involves the sharing of information.

A first step - sometimes called “agitation” - involves the activist attempting to *link* a particular grievance mentioned to them by their discussion partner to some broader political force or set of agents. In this stage, activists ask their interlocutor: which specific individuals or collective agents or (formal or informal) institutional rules are responsible for your grievance? In doing so, they encourage their discussion partner to provide their own information about an important *source* of their troubles and who might benefit from, or resist, attempts to change the status quo (the interlocutor might not

previously have thought of their ability to access medical care, education, housing, or a well-paid job with appropriate hours, as a product of power or of politics at all). Activists themselves can also share information about the privileges currently enjoyed by various economic and political elites, or how political power operates to the disadvantage of the interlocutor. To continue our shop steward example, the trade union activist and their fellow worker might share information with one another concerning how greedy, uncaring bosses appear to act as a key source of the workplace's unfair conditions, and how many other workers possess similar grievances.

A second step - sometimes called "vision" - then sees the activist and their interlocutor sharing information about both a certain alternative view of how things could look, if this grievance was tackled, and a plan of action for how to achieve this. For example, our shop steward and their discussion partner might share information about what a fully unionized workplace, with institutionalized workplace bargaining could or did look like (or already does look like elsewhere) and how this appears to rectify the grievance discussed (McAlevey 2016, 36-7).¹⁰⁵ They might also share information about how an effective way to change the work experience of their interlocutor for the better in this or some other way would be to commit to workplace

¹⁰⁵ That the vision is tightly linked to the grievance under discussion is highly important: activist visions less tightly linked to current personal grievances, such as those which rely instead on the presence of altruistic or nostalgic feelings on the part of the interlocutor, are highly unlikely to be persuasive (Richman 2020, 102).

unionization or going on strike. An integral part of this “vision” step is convincing the discussion partner that it is within (for example) the worker’s power (alongside others) to bring this state of affairs about, and that particular political organisations or collectives can play a productive role in helping to achieve these ends.

A third step – sometimes called “inoculation” – then involves the activist offering information which can repel likely counterarguments that their discussion partner might have or is likely to come across after the conversation has ended (McElroy 2019, 334). For our shop steward, this might involve offering information which can act as a retort to potential arguments the worker is likely to be confronted with by their boss or sceptical co-workers, such as claims about the infeasibility of the ultimate vision (whether due to a lack of funds or otherwise), the certainty of defeat for the plan to achieve it or the insignificance of individual effort. For example, activists might share information about the presence of concrete alternatives to the present predicaments of their interlocutors in other places and at other times. The activist and their interlocutor might also share personal stories about the valuable outcomes they have experienced from previous instances of political participation or share information about how previous political or social gains have been successfully achieved as a result of such participation.

What we can hopefully begin to see here is the various ways in which the first, disruptive, stage of consciousness-raising, on my model, is crucial to the likelihood of success of organising conversations.

Performing various acts of epistemic disruption is a crucial way to alter the lived experience of the interlocutor *prior* to their even being confronted with an activist on their doorstep or in their workplace. The “agitation” step of the organising conversation, for example, can plausibly be achieved much more straightforwardly if it takes place against a backdrop of persistent rhetorical interventions from left populists pointing to the injustice of the privileges currently enjoyed by elites. And similarly, the “vision” and “inoculation” steps can also be achieved much more straightforwardly if they take place against a backdrop of democratic municipalist action which highlights the possibility of radical change and mobilisation in the immediate vicinity of the activist’s discussion partner.

Of course, the exact nature (and order) of these persuasive steps tends to vary depending on the precise structure that the activist happens to favour, and the circumstances of the citizen with whom they are interacting. A conversation with an already somewhat politically committed member of the egalitarian constituency about upping their participation levels is likely to involve very different kinds of information-sharing to one with a serially disengaged citizen whose grievances chiefly concern illegal immigrants and welfare cheats. And sometimes (perhaps even most of the time) a conversation will remain stuck at one persuasive stage and then follow-up conversations will be necessary to reach the stage of actually making an ask (Lopez 2004, 95; McElroy 2019, 333; Nielsen 2012, 90). But – typically at least - activists engaging in organising conversations try to move through something

like these three steps.

As should also be clear from these examples, I also understand the “information” shared in each of these persuasive steps in a relatively broad and expansive sense, encompassing not simply facts and figures, but also stories and narratives. Sometimes, important information relating to the vision or inoculation stages will even be communicated by the *mere presence* of a committed political activist at one’s doorstep, or in one’s workplace, as this can potentially demonstrate (for example) that the stakes are sufficiently high, or the goal sufficiently feasible, to warrant the engagement of others in political participation. Pons, for example, speculates that “the signal sent by” the presence of a politically committed activist seeking to engage their discussion partner in conversation can sometimes be more important than any of the “specific arguments” activists can offer in leading to cognitive change (Pons 2018, 1355; Nielsen 2012, 93).¹⁰⁶

Now that we are somewhat clearer about the structure that organising conversations typically follow, one question we might have concerns the extent to which they can really be said to represent a distinctive political practice, when compared to other - seemingly very similar - types of political communication, such as political canvassing

¹⁰⁶ This is probably why some activists claim that there “is no electronic substitute” for the kinds of persuasion that face-to-face organising conversations can sometimes achieve (Chambers 2018, 41; Stout 2010, 164; cf. White and Ypi 2016, 220). In this chapter, however, I try to remain neutral on this debate about the extent to which face-to-face organising conversations should be prioritized over other, more mediated instances of the practice, such as those that take place on the telephone or online.

and everyday political talk. Consequently, we can gain an even clearer picture of the scope and nature of organising conversations by briefly comparing them with these two adjacent forms of political communication.

5.2 The contrast with other forms of political communication

Perhaps the most familiar form of verbal political communication is what we might term *traditional political canvassing*. Traditional canvassing is a practice which takes place when political activists arrive unannounced on strangers' doorsteps during door-to-door neighbourhood walks. However, whilst organising conversations certainly can take something like this form (trade union organisers sometimes call these "house visits"), they are not limited to this setting, and can also take place during breaks or after shifts at work (Lopez 2004, 73), online or on the telephone, perhaps at a bus stop or train station, in the pub, or even at the family dinner table (McAlevey 2019). And they often take place among those who already have a prior relationship or bond established (even if it is just that of co-worker or fellow party member) rather than among complete strangers.

Additionally, traditional canvassers typically only have the aim of repeating short soundbites which make up a given campaign's "pitch", of thanking allies for their support (and perhaps inviting them to take a placard or poster), or of identifying unsympathetic voters in order to help with better targeting future canvasses. Canvassing thus often does

not centrally involve the enquiring about citizens' grievances and the concerted attempt to share highly relevant and targeted kinds of information that is integral to organising conversations. In fact, traditional canvassing typically has more in common with the kinds of unidirectional information-sharing that might occur when, for instance, a citizen reads a political leaflet delivered through their door by an activist or listens to a pre-prepared political speech at a community meeting. By contrast, the information-sharing that takes place in successful organising conversations is highly *bidirectional* and *contingent*, involving the constant process of "mutual attunement" that Anthony Laden has claimed is central to all true conversation (Laden 2012, 132).

In short, effective organising conversations are importantly distinct from more unidirectional forms of political communication because they involve *both* participants continually adjusting the information they had initially intended to offer to ensure that their discussion partner has understood or grasped the meaning of their attempted communication. As conversations, organising conversations necessarily involve *both* participants continually striving to reach a common ground via certain kinds of (loose and revisable) agreements about the assumptions embedded within the conversation, such as its terms of reference, the meaning of certain words and common standards of veracity and reasonableness (Laden 2012, 119). This necessitates that both participants in the conversation be "willing to be touched or affected" by what the other says, adjusting or altering their

views to some extent as a result of what is being said, rather than stubbornly ploughing ahead with their preconceived vision of how the conversations should go, regardless of what their discussion partner says (Laden 2012, 116).

Of course, in most organising conversations, the hope is that, at least in certain respects, the activist is *more* successful in attuning their interlocutor towards them, and their way of seeing things, than the discussion partner is in attuning the activist towards them. This is what enables the activist to remain relatively sure of their own political commitments and their overall plan for the conversation and successfully make an ask, without completely re-evaluating their intentions and plans, or breaking off from engaging in an organising conversation completely.

But this does not mean that activists must not themselves also engage in constant attunement towards their discussion partner. Most obviously, it is the discussion partner who determines much of the precise nature of the conversation by revealing the grievance that happens to be concerning them at a particular moment in time. This means the activist must be open to their interlocutors' ability to determine the discussion's starting point, and much of what follows from it. Additionally, the interlocutor can put an end to the organising conversation at essentially any time (whether that involves making their apologies and closing the door, walking away from the activist, or changing the subject of the discussion) and so the activist must also be open to these possibilities, and factor them into their approach to the

conversation. Activists also need to be open to adjusting the ratio of time spent offering their own information, and merely eliciting and listening to information already possessed by their interlocutor, depending on how the conversation unfolds, and how amenable the information offered by the interlocutor is to the ask that the activist eventually wishes to make. Navigating all these matters effectively involves the activist possessing a picture of how the conversation should progress, and what their discussion partner thinks, that remains fundamentally unsettled and open to revision, as the conversation unfolds.¹⁰⁷

Whilst there are several contrasts with traditional canvassing, therefore, perhaps the most important is the emphasis that successful organising conversations place on this process of mutual attunement, rather than simply repeating short soundbites. But whilst it is important to emphasize the fundamentally *conversational* nature of organising conversations, we also should not *over-emphasize* their lack of structure. This is because organising conversations are also usually

¹⁰⁷ It might be thought that this mutual attunement can only occur if both participants have absolutely no preconceived conversational structure or plan in mind. Michael Oakeshott potentially lends weight to such a worry when he claims that as soon as a discussion partner ceases to think about their conversation as valuable “for its own sake”, where the purpose is merely the fleeting “pleasure of the ride” itself, and the content is determined spontaneously in an adventurous, responsive fashion, this is necessarily reflective of a desire to “overpower” one’s discussion partner and consider them to be little more than prey on a hunt (Oakeshott 2004 [1948], 187-90). But I think this is a mistake: provided they do not entirely prohibit prospects for detour and improvisation, the presence of plans may in fact be *productive*, rather than constraining, enabling a conversation to take place in an adventurous way.

importantly distinct from what Jane Mansbridge terms *everyday political talk*, that is, discussion on matters of common concern which takes place mostly in “homes, workplaces, and places where a few friends meet” (Mansbridge 1999, 212).

Discussion of this kind is undoubtedly a relatively pervasive aspect of life in democratic society, but it does not typically involve citizens engaging in dedicated and distinct bouts of political discussion (Jacobs, Cook and Carpin 2009, 37). Rather, most everyday political discussion tends to be relatively ad hoc, with political discussion topics integrated in a relatively spontaneous, unplanned, and unstructured way into more general conversation (Conover and Miller 2018). Organising conversations, by contrast, are conducted by activists with the specific aims and distinct steps in mind discussed above, so they usually remain an order of magnitude more intentional and structured than everyday political talk.

Additionally, most informal everyday political talk disproportionately takes place among the already likeminded (Conover and Miller 2018). And women, non-whites and the poor are all consistently underrepresented among those citizens that report routinely engaging in explicitly political discussion with others (Jacobs, Cook and Carpin 2009, 58). With organising conversations, by contrast, as the centrality of making an ask to the practice makes clear, the aim of this activity is usually precisely to identify and discuss political issues with *those who don't already share one's views* and often to seek out in particular those citizens that are not already highly politically active or

already in possession of extensive political discussion networks.

Of course, *some* everyday political talk does involve one of the participants making concerted and prolonged attempts to isolate and persuade in ways fundamentally similar to organising conversations (these individuals are sometimes called “issue persuaders” or “vote persuaders” (Jacobs, Cook and Carpin 2009, 36; Mansbridge 1999, 217-8)). And *some* activists also engage in the canvassing of neighbourhoods in a way which does in fact endeavour to both isolate issues residents care about and persuade them that some form of political participation is a desirable way to help solve or alleviate this issue (this kind of persuasive canvassing is sometimes referred to as “deep canvassing” (Denizet-Lewis 2016)). It will thus sometimes be hard to say exactly when a “deep canvasser” or an “issue persuader” becomes someone engaged in an organising conversation, and vice versa. This means that much of what I will go on to say about the ways in which organising conversations can potentially be transitionally valuable will also apply to these other sub-categories of everyday talk and political canvassing. Nonetheless, the contrast between organising conversations and at least *most* everyday talk and *most* traditional canvassing remains an important one.

5.3 The effectiveness of organising conversations

We now know what an organising conversation looks like, and how it is different from related practices. But can they really work as an effective

means to generate participatory intent among members of the egalitarian constituency? Anyone with prior experience of trying to persuade others will likely possess a great deal of scepticism about the potential persuasive effects of organising conversations.

The claim I am seeking to defend is not that organising conversations will always or even most of the time result in the generation of participatory intent. For example, there will often be cases where an activist's interlocutor is highly committed to their existing views: if individuals are consciously and ideologically committed to the idea that political participation is against the wishes of God, for instance, and can offer thought-out reasons for this stance, then it seems highly improbable that the mere offering of certain kinds of information in a one-on-one conversation will be enough to generate participatory intent (and pushing too hard for all-out persuasion in these circumstances can sometimes even result in a "backlash" against the intended cause that the persuader supports (Bailey, Hopkins and Rogers 2016)).

But there is some compelling empirical evidence that it won't always be unrealistic to expect a persuasive effect from one (or, more likely, several) organising conversations.¹⁰⁸ Structured interpersonal

¹⁰⁸ Persuasion takes time: Brian F. Harrison, for instance, refers to what he calls "the long road of persuasion" (Harrison 2020, 151). We should certainly not overemphasize the significance or worth of *one* conversation, but that does not mean that this single conversation cannot form an integral part of a broader *process* of effective persuasion, taking place over time and through a wide variety of means. Additionally, even if single or multiple organising conversations are unable to successfully move through each of these stages, and thus fail

political conversation has been shown to be capable of resulting in a relatively long-lasting persuasion of this sort: individuals can sometimes have their commitments about which parties and policies to support altered (or be persuaded to adopt a commitment to vote), for example, as a result of persuasive one-on-one conversation (Kalla and Broockman 2020; Green and Gerber 2015, 31; Pons 2018, 1325). There is also some very useful empirical evidence on the kinds of conditions that need to be in place during an interpersonal conversation for the chances of persuasion to be maximized. I briefly highlight four such conditions.

First, research highlights the importance of *existing affective bonds* between interlocutor and activist. It is true that prospects for rejection among complete strangers are fairly high – particularly if the activist doesn't share various characteristics with their interlocutor, such as race, gender, or age (Nielsen 2012 86; Harrison 2020, 154). But there is some evidence to suggest that organising conversations taking place between an activist and interlocutor who are already familiar with one another substantially increases the chances for commitment-generation.

Persuasion is most likely to succeed when it takes place among those who already have strong emotional ties because where these ties

to successfully generate participatory intent, they might still serve a valuable purpose as *another* form of epistemic disruption, potentially working alongside and in concert with left populist discourse and democratic municipalism to temporarily dislodge the hold of the kinds of frames discussed in the last chapter.

are absent, discussion partners tend to remain more reticent about completely buying into the information offered to them by others.

Smith finds that individuals are more likely to pay attention to, accept, and remember political information their family, friends, and neighbours provide because the emotional connections between the discussants “help overcome resistance to learning” (Smith 2016, 409).

Hahrie Han, similarly, stresses that existing social relationships often play “important roles in triggering [...] initial participation” in political activity, with individuals far more likely to reply affirmatively to an ask if it comes from someone with whom they have an existing relationship (Han 2009, 109). Conversations between individuals already familiar with one another are more likely to have common referents and experiences that provide the necessary foundations for the conversation and make getting it off the ground easier. It is when these affective bonds are already in place that the activist doesn’t normally have to work to prove that they *understand* what worries or aggrieves their interlocutor, as their will be an often unspoken sense that both are “on the same page”, at least in certain respects.

Second, Kalla and Broockman (2020, 423) highlight the importance of the activist being non-judgmental to engaging in a persuasive conversation. By contrast, if the activist appears dismissive about their interlocutor’s grievances, or appears highly offended by their existing analysis of the cause of their problems, discussion partners are likely to close up and the opportunity for persuasive information-sharing is likely to be over. Harnessing the requisite non-

judgemental attitude is a trait that is unlikely to come entirely naturally to many, especially given that a key part of *being* politically active is usually being highly judgemental and dismissive about a variety of claims and arguments circulating in the political sphere.

Third, there is also some evidence that, at least in a society with high levels of political polarization, conversations “conducted far in advance of a general election”, when partisan cues are less likely to predominate in the reasoning of many individuals, potentially have a higher chance of successfully persuading (Kalla and Broockman 2018, 163). Especially given the dominance of privatistic frames, most individuals think most about political issues at specific moments of heightened intensity, but these moments are also not typically very conducive to persuasive information-sharing because individuals are highly attuned to information that doesn’t fit their pre-existing ideas and are likely to reject it on partisan grounds.

Finally, there is evidence to suggest that carefully deployed presentational and rhetorical tools, such as speaking with confidence, and the usage of metaphor, figures of speech, humour, analogy and so on, will facilitate proper attention to the information the activist is offering to their interlocutor and work against various negative associations that close down the opportunity for persuasion (Badano and Nuti 2018, 161; Dillard and Shen 2013; Lakoff 1996; Partington and Taylor 2018). The most successful organising conversations will generally be ones that manage to utilise arresting images, memorable narratives, and put their interlocutor at ease. Rhetoric is often

associated with manipulativeness, but following Markovits, I think it important to note that “rhetoric is a quality of all (human) language use, one that is thoroughly intertwined with any utterance” (Markovits 2006, 262). We all choose to present our arguments in particular ways: even when we just use the dominant presentational standards unconsciously, this is still a kind of rhetorical choice. The risk of rhetorical manipulation should thus not be overstated. Usually, the activist’s interlocutor will not be under any illusions as to the political intentions of the activist with whom they are engaged in conversation: most discussion partners will quickly come to the realisation as the conversation unfolds that the activist with whom they have emotional bonds is trying to get them to change their views to some extent. As Stout puts it, “[m]ost people have a nose for manipulation in the context of face-to- face interaction” (Stout 2010, 161).

Of course, given their myriad work and family obligations, there will always be an upper limit on how much time activists can reasonably expect even very receptive members of the egalitarian constituency to agree to spend on political participation, even when they are careful to observe all the above conditions. However, excluding time for personal care and the various forms of labour members of this group typically must perform, empirical findings suggest that many members of this group will still have upwards of 15-20 hours free time or leisure time per week, at least some of which activists could potentially persuade them to dedicate to the cause of egalitarian social change.

For example, the average employed male and female American in 2019 claims to have enough time in their average weekday for over 3 hours of “leisure activities”, and they spend over half of this (between 1.5-2 hours per weekday) watching television. On Saturdays and Sundays, this figure rises to over *3 hours a day* spent watching television (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). Very similar figures are available from the 2010 Harmonised European Time Use Surveys (HETUS, 2010) and given that most people likely underestimate the amount of time they spend undertaking passive activities, real figures are potentially even higher than this.¹⁰⁹

We can thus acknowledge with Erik Olin Wright, that the “tasks of daily life, especially once one has a family and children, take enormous amounts of time, energy and attention” (Wright 2019, 134) *without* simultaneously endorsing the conclusion that there is simply *no* time left over for activists to attempt to persuade others to dedicate to political participation. Perhaps, among the very most disadvantaged strata of the egalitarian constituency, there will be some cases where these tasks of daily life, and the cognitive strains involved in keeping up with them, literally leave no time that could be productively applied to egalitarian social change. But more commonly, the real problem for activists in organising conversations is to find ways to encourage their interlocutors to spend less time in their passive, privatistic pursuits, and more time on collective political activity.

¹⁰⁹ For some fascinating normative reflections on the findings of time use surveys, see Goodin, Rice, Parpo and Eriksson (2008).

Crudely, what fostering the initial motivation to participate in political acts of some kind will often involve, in essence, is motivating sufficient numbers of the egalitarian constituency to spend a few less hours each week watching television, and a few more engaging in political participation of some kind. Prospects for engendering participatory intent are perhaps *particularly* good among the youngest sections of this constituency, because it is the young that usually possess the most “biographical availability”: lacking existing commitments that might interfere with their willingness to engage in political activity (Ganz 2010, 531; Beyerlein and Bergstrand 2013).

Additionally, it is important to point out that some sections of the egalitarian constituency will already spend a chunk of their leisure time on political activity, broadly construed (perhaps they watch *BBC News*, rather than *The Simpsons*, or read the politics section of *The Guardian*, rather than scrolling through *Instagram*). In these cases, similarly, the goal of the political activist is to encourage such citizens to spend the time they dedicate to political activity less passively. Consider, for example, this finding from Eitan Hersh about what he calls “political hobbyists”: four-fifths of those Americans who claim to already be highly civically engaged, spending two or more hours a day on political activity of one kind or another, “say that *not one minute of that time* is spent on any kind of real political work. It’s all TV news and podcasts and radio shows and social media and cheering and booing and complaining to friends and family” (Hersh 2020, 3, emphasis added).

This provides us with a fairly strong partial and presumptive case,

I think, for considering organising conversations to be one of the key practices that possess what I have been calling transitional value: If the activist's ask is plausibly linked to participation in some potentially (TE) consciousness-raising activity, these successful asks are themselves likely to be highly transitionally valuable, given that they generate an important precondition for the raising of class consciousness.¹¹⁰

5.4 Avoiding impermissibility risks

Claiming that certain acts which raise or build participatory intent in contemporary societies might effectively contribute to our three-stage process of consciousness-raising, however, is not sufficient by itself to talk in general about outcomes that are and are not transitionally valuable. Constructing a compelling theoretical account of what "we" should do from where we are now is not simply a matter of mapping pathways of action that appear to *successfully* move us closer to our desired goal. The question of transitional political action is one, to use a phrase of Isiah Berlin's, that is "inescapably charged with ethical [...]" content", rather than being a solely empirical, technical matter (Berlin 2013, 206). An important component of what it would mean to provide

¹¹⁰ Organising conversations intending to generate an intention to attend a white supremacist rally, for instance, are not what I have in mind here: I am envisioning organising conversations being undertaken by already-mobilised members of the egalitarian constituency in their attempts to persuade their less active or inactive fellow members to participate in the kinds of political activities which can plausibly generate (TE) class consciousness.

a theory of transitional value is thus attention to the question of moral *permissibility*: we need to ask, in other words, if the given course of transitional political action is not *just* likely to be effective, but also compatible, all things considered, with our moral duties or obligations to others.¹¹¹

What I want to do in this section is thus to briefly highlight two conditions which I think attempts at generating participatory intent in organising conversations ought generally to abide by if they are to be morally permissible. It is important to state, however, that it is very difficult to draw hard and fast rules about what we morally owe to one another given that social conditions and individual action will often alter these obligations, sometimes radically. For example, it seems plausible that there will sometimes be situations in which activists might gain a moral permission to engage in presumptively impermissible acts, despite their potential negative moral impact. For example, sharing false or misleading information might sometimes be the only way to ensure that the plight of a particular marginalized group will not be silenced or ignored, or that those unaffected by a particular injustice will come to be moved to rectify a grave wrong

¹¹¹ Some Marxist thinkers will likely think that to include discussion of moral permissibility in our transitional theorizing is already to bow down before “bourgeois” liberal ideology in a way that guarantees strategic defeat (Trotsky 1992 [1938]). Part of what is wrong, in my view, with this kind of blanket rejection of anything with even a whiff of liberalism, is that it neglects that liberalism is a complex ideological inheritance, with many “tessellated factions”, to use a phrase of Duncan Bell’s (Bell 2016, 371). For further radical engagements with the liberal tradition of moral and political theorizing, see Mills (2017) and Rooksby (2012).

(Hendrix 2019, 86). Like with many issues concerning the ethics of political action, it is hard to make hard and fast rules that apply constantly over a very wide range of circumstances.

Nonetheless, we can helpfully think about questions of the permissibility of various forms of consciousness-raising in terms of differing “risk profiles” for impermissibility (Monaghan 2021, 27-8). We need to fill in lots of empirical blanks in a given situation of consciousness-raising to make an all-things-considered judgement of (im)permissibility, but we can still state that in general, the *risk* of impermissibility is substantially diminished if consciousness-raisers observe some important moral conditions. Generating beliefs in others is an activity fraught with the *risk* of moral impermissibility and this risk will normally best be avoided by observing several conditions.

When it comes to the permissibility of the second of my three-stage consciousness-raising model, I wish to focus in particular on two: avoiding generating both *false* and *misleading* beliefs.

Of course, one possible way to achieve participation from an interlocutor in a given political act would be to literally *compel* that agent to act in a way the activist desired. Joel Feinberg describes compulsion as occurring when one agent *closes an option* previously available to another “in the sense that some alternative, or all alternatives, to a given act are made impossible [...] working either directly on one's body, or indirectly on external facilities” (Feinberg 1986, 190). Feinberg also supplies us with two useful examples: one agent may overpower another and literally drag them to where they

want them to be, or an agent may lock another in a room so they are unable to leave (Feinberg 1986, 190). It is not just that it is now “too costly” for an agent to remain in the same place or leave their room (as with a coercive threat, for instance), but rather that such moves are literally ruled out by the actions of another. Attempting to achieve political participation in these ways would almost always certainly be immoral. But notice that things unfolding in this way doesn’t appear to pose much of an impermissibility risk in a regular organising conversation: the whole emphasis of the conversation is on engendering an *intent* to participate through *persuasive information-sharing*. Rather, impermissibility risks seem to arise most straightforwardly when there is a worry that the requisite *intent* has been achieved in a somehow untoward or underhand manner.

The first, and perhaps most obvious, permissibility condition I thus wish to specify on generating beliefs in others is thus that consciousness-raisers ought to take due care to avoid causing others to take on *false* beliefs. I conceive of taking “due care” to involve taking relatively intuitive precautions before sharing information or seeking to persuade others, such as basic fact-checking and research. Sometimes, regardless of how careful and conscientious a given consciousness-raiser is to avoid some undesirable consequence, this consequence still comes about. But as Seana Shiffrin notes, it is not plausible that we “have a comprehensive duty to avoid or correct all misunderstandings and mistaken inferences” by others in our interactions with them (Shiffrin 2014, 22-3). Whilst such an outcome may be undesirable and

regrettable for various reasons, if the consciousness-raiser has still done what can reasonably be demanded of them, they are not at fault or liable to blame.

The reason for this permissibility condition is that we normally take it to be wrong to play a key part (whether knowingly or unknowingly) in causing others to be disillusioned in some way. Raising or engendering beliefs of this kind seems likely to damage or constrain the *epistemic agency* of the individual whose consciousness is being raised. We can understand an individual as exercising their epistemic agency when they appropriately employ their rational faculties - such as their capacity to recognize and to weigh reasons - in their internal deliberations about what to do and what to think (Lackey 2021, 5; Tsai 2014, 97).

Valuing epistemic agency does not commit one to the view that individuals could or should be completely epistemically *self-reliant*, but it does mean holding that individuals should strive to exercise independent thinking, appropriately canvassing and weighing reasons for themselves in their deliberations, rather than having the reasons of another imposed on them without their reasoned approval. A due regard for the epistemic agency of others gives us strong reasons to refrain from engaging in certain kinds of behaviours in our interactions with others that can plausibly interfere with their ability to exercise this capacity (Tsai 2014). Encouraging others to subscribe to false beliefs plausibly makes incursions on their epistemic agency and thus fails to treat them as capable of making their own decisions about what

commitments they ought to hold, and what goals they ought to pursue and why, and is therefore to fail in some sense to recognize them as capable of living their own lives (Raz 2004, 289; Darwall 2006). Part of what it is to respect others as agents capable of making their own rational decisions about how to live is to not actively cause them to make more misjudgements about social reality than they otherwise would have.

Imagine, for a moment, implanting what we could call the *Zionist conspiracy belief* in others during the “agitation” stage of an organising conversation, causing them to believe that the cause of socialism and peace in the Middle East is consciously obstructed by a formal organization of Jewish financial and political elites. This means these belief-holders would tend to be frequently deluded about the nature of causal mechanisms in the political world, attributing an unrealistic level of power, control and knowledge to one small group of political actors and holding that the ultimate allegiance of all Jewish people lies with the state of Israel, rather than with achieving some other set of shared political goals.¹¹²

A second, closely related permissibility condition on generating beliefs in others is that consciousness-raisers ought to take due care to avoid causing others to take on *misleading* beliefs. As I noted, we normally take it to be wrong to play a key part (whether knowingly or

¹¹² For an examination of the historical roots of "Anti-Jewish anticapitalism", see Battini (2016) and, for the UK case, Philo et al. (2019).

unknowingly) in causing others to be disillusioned, but disillusion can sometimes be the result of sharing even justified true beliefs. For instance, most facts about social reality have what we could call a limited sphere of applicability: just because they may be the answer to some specific question we could ask, certainly does not mean they are the answer to *everything*. We might imagine an activist, for example, using an organising conversation to share true information from a firm's annual board report with a worker, but which is taken out of context by the activist in such a way to cause their discussion partner to take on a false view. This kind of attempt at persuasion seems just as problematic as the inculcation of false beliefs. But in general, I think agents can permissibly seek to change the existing beliefs of others in organising conversations, provided they take due care to avoid generating false and/or misleading beliefs of this sort.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the second stage of my three-part model of consciousness-raising: the generation of what I call *participatory intent*, and the transitionally valuable role that organising conversations play in creating and maintaining it. I defined organising conversations as structured, one-on-one discussions in which activists aim to isolate a citizen's grievances, and then share relevant information to persuade them that engaging in political participation of some kind is the best

way to alleviate their complaints. After describing what this practice involves, I compared them to several adjacent, but usually distinct forms of verbal political communication. The first was traditional neighbourhood canvassing, a practice which takes place when political activists arrive unannounced on strangers' doorsteps during door-to-door neighbourhood walks. The second was everyday political talk, the kinds of quotidian political discussion which take place in the home and elsewhere.

I then made a case for the practice as a central means for effectively generating participatory intent: I drew on evidence which demonstrated that structured interpersonal political conversations are capable of resulting in a relatively long-lasting persuasion effect and highlighted several conditions which – if present – can maximize the prospects for the generation of participatory intent taking place. The final section then examined how activists conducting these conversations can avoid what I call impermissibility risks, by refraining from implanting false or misleading beliefs in their interlocutors.

6

The Transitional Value of Activist-led Education

I have argued that those already convinced of the desirability of a radically more egalitarian economic settlement should seek to raise transformative egalitarian class consciousness in order to increase the chances of this social change coming about. I have also argued that this consciousness-raising comprises three stages: epistemic disruption, the generation of participatory intent, and then epistemic transformation. By what concrete means should this final, transformative stage (consciousness-raising “proper”) be undertaken, if it is to be both morally permissible and politically effective? This chapter claims that it is participation of members of the egalitarian constituency in what I call *pedagogically oriented class struggle organisations* that is best suited to effectively generating the belief complex central to (TE) class consciousness. The paradigmatic examples of class struggle organisations that I will refer to throughout this chapter are political parties, trade unions, and social movements that aim to realize egalitarian transformations of the class structure.¹¹³

¹¹³ Trade unions are famously defined by Sidney and Beatrice Webb as an “association of wage-earners for the purpose of maintaining or improving the conditions of their working lives” (Webb and Webb, 1920: 1). I construe conditions of employment broadly to encompass everything from wages, health and safety protections, sexual harassment policies, termination of employment and redundancy policies, pension, holiday, and sick pay entitlements. Many trade unions following what industrial relations scholars term the “service model” of trade unionism will often not meet the definition of class struggle organisation. Such organisations primarily offer certain goods (such as

I highlight two main reasons why such organisations appear to be well-suited to generating the transitionally valuable kind of class consciousness. On the one hand, under certain conditions, experiences of participating in class struggle organisations will often involve the kind of *informal education* that can generate and strengthen the belief-desire complex central to ^(TE) class consciousness. On the other, if such organisations also make a concerted effort to engage in *formal* education of various sorts – providing information and concerted opportunities to learn it through discussion, writing and application – this can also play a role in generating ^(TE) class consciousness.

I then move on to deal with an important worry about the prospects for these organisations permissibly generating the right kind of class consciousness under present political conditions. I claim that activist educators can permissibly inculcate class conscious beliefs provided they place an emphasis on the simultaneous inculcation of what I will call *reflective capacity*. There is a further worry which concerns whether leaders of class struggle organisations can possess

legal advice, work-related training, and various consumer discounts) in exchange for compensation (union “dues”), much like a private healthcare firm, a dry-cleaning company, or any other consumer service provider (Fairbrother 2002; Rosenfeld 2014, 11). This kind of trade unionism usually prioritises cooperative, non-confrontational relations with the decision-making institutions that determine employment conditions, rather than seeking to ensure decisions are made in these institutions which result in egalitarian transformations of various sorts. Many political parties – even many parties with historic ties to the working class – will also not meet the definition of class struggle organisations, as they are dominated by an office-seeking party elite that is not primarily concerned with egalitarian transformations of the class structure (Mair 2013).

the requisite dispositions to ensure that this kind of class consciousness is in fact raised in an all-things-considered permissible way. But I claim, in the final section, that there are reasons to be sceptical that the delicate balancing of ends that desirable activist-led education requires is either categorically unachievable, or avoidable, in the way these objectors press.

6.1 Informal education for class consciousness

I understand education - derived from the Latin *ducere*, meaning "to lead," or "bring forward" (Hoad 1996, 142) - as an activity aimed at the acquisition of beliefs, desires, and skills. Formal education, on my account, is any educative activity which is "organized deliberately to fulfil the specific purpose" of acquiring these beliefs, desires, and skills (Scribner and Cole 1973, 555). While receiving an undergraduate degree in public policy, for example, I might attend pre-planned lectures about the nature of the property market and the construction industry in Britain, speak in seminars facilitated by a lecturer with a series of learning outcomes in mind, and set myself a concrete plan of reading a given number of the books on a reading list related to this topic. These are instances of *formal* education: what is doing the leading or bringing forward in each case is a book, a facilitator, or a lecturer.

Informal education, by contrast, is any activity or experience which is *not* organized deliberately to fulfil the specific purpose of acquiring certain beliefs and skills, but which nonetheless still results in

the participant in the activity acquiring these things (Foley 1999; Scribner and Cole 1973). In the course of an evening of discussion with old school friends in the pub, for instance, I might acquire the belief that young people are currently facing systematic obstacles in their attempts to leave the rental market and buy a house, even though it wasn't my (or anyone else's) deliberate aim or intention to learn about that at that given moment. This is thus an instance of *informal* education: whilst leading or bringing forward of a certain kind is occurring in this example, it is not the intentional result of a facilitator, a lecturer, or an author.

My first claim is that class struggle organisations like parties, unions and social movements can be organised in such a way that whilst citizens that participate in them do not have the specific aim of acquiring or strengthening the beliefs central to ^(TE) class consciousness in mind, this is still the result of their activities. In other words, I argue that if activists can be successful in engendering an intent to participate in class struggle organisations, this participation can in turn become what Luxemburg calls a "living political school" (Luxemburg 2008 [1906], 130; cf. Lukács 2009 [1924], 34). Taking part in collective action (protests, strikes, election campaigns, propaganda campaigns), but also helping to plan and organise such actions through deliberative discussion,¹¹⁴ are forms of experience that tend to inculcate class

¹¹⁴ Giving people opportunities to deliberate about organisational priorities and strategies does not commit us to arguing that class struggle organisations should always be entirely "horizontalist" and directly democratic. I leave this question of the precise specification of

conscious beliefs.¹¹⁵ If members of the egalitarian constituency attend party, social movement or union meetings, and enter into deliberations with other participants about the most appropriate course of action the organisation ought to take, this can result in the generation and strengthening of the belief-desire complex central to to (TE) class consciousness. These kinds of acts by class struggle organisations are clearly not going to bring about the end of capitalist class rule by themselves, but I claim that they are valuable because of their epistemically transformative potential.

In terms of the first belief I have claimed is central to transformative egalitarian class consciousness, for example - the class belonging belief - deliberation and action can result in individuals gaining a clearer sense of the existence of and boundaries between the capitalist, middle and working class. Face-to-face discussion can reveal previously undisclosed commonalities of both experience and desire between members of such organisations, and as views are re-negotiated in dialogue with others, and individuals come to share in a common political project, an affective bond with other participants can be

the democratic nature of these organisations to one side here. This is because my hunch is that different political circumstances call for different levels and kinds of democracy in these organisations. On the one hand, democratic influence can obviously minimize the extent of the disconnect that will often arise between leaders and other members. But at the same time, it will often sometimes be necessary and prudent to let leaders act tactically in ways without first gaining the democratic assent of members (Hardt and Negri 2017, 18-22).

¹¹⁵ For some empirical evidence on the psychologically transformative effects of participation in acts like protest, see Pop-Eleches, Robertson, and Rosenfeld (2022).

established and strengthened. Deliberative activity enables members of class struggle organisations to understand more clearly what they share with others, both *revealing* similarities in values or interests, and potentially *building* new ones. As Taylor, Nanz and Taylor argue, “[f]ace-to-face contact often softens our stereotypical hostilities toward each other”, strengthening a sense of being on the same side and in the same boat (2020: 23; Pettigrew and Tropp 2008).

In terms of the second belief – the class inequality belief - through informal education, participants in class struggle organisations may come to see interconnections between various grievances they had previously considered to be separate and unrelated. Listening to others complain about a given power-consequence that they experience can also help draw attention to the *structural* cause of a given issue individuals face.

In terms of the third component of ^(TE) class consciousness – the curtailing inequality desire - deliberation and collective action can lead individuals to gain a clearer sense of the kind of future for the class structure that might be desirable. Witnessing one's fellow members of the egalitarian constituency attend political meetings, or populate picket lines, for instance, can increase one's sense of the feasibility of an egalitarian transformation of the social structure of production taking place, and potentially also alter one's views about the kind of future that might be possible (in particular how solidaristic and democratic it could be).

In terms of the fourth component - the collective working class

action belief - planning and executing collective action in class struggle organisations can also cause one to adopt the relevant belief. When those disadvantaged by the current class structure come up against fierce opposition from its beneficiaries in the process of collective action, this will often provide what Lukács calls an “object-lesson” (Lukács 2014d [1920], 77) that can cause agents to alter their beliefs about the nature of this antagonistic group, and potentially adopt a more hostile stance towards them. As active members of class struggle organisations face political resistance, this can plausibly entrench a belief about the necessity of large-scale collective action on the part of the working class as a necessary ingredient for making stable egalitarian gains.

As these experiences mount up, the extent to which these beliefs will be robustly action-guiding for the participants in these organisations will likely also increase. Importantly, it is not even the case that the actions discussed and carried out by participants in class struggle organisations necessarily need to be *successful* to generate these beliefs. Sometimes, as Lukács, notes, they might even be “more strongly encouraged through mistakes” (Lukács 2000 [1926], 78).

Members of a political party in Britain that aims at an egalitarian transformation of the class structure might learn, in the course of a terrible failure of their most recent campaign, for instance, that a very important feature of the power of the capitalist class, for instance, which they had previously neglected, is their influence over the news media. This belief then comes to form a more substantive part of their

future deliberations and actions.¹¹⁶

Of course, it is possible to imagine individuals attaining the beliefs central to ^(TE) class consciousness without ever participating in deliberative discussion or collective action of this sort: perhaps they were just raised this way, having excerpts from Bini Adamczak's *Communism for Kids* (2017) and various socialist fairy tales (Rosen 2018) read to them every night before bed. Or perhaps they attain it through a personal moment of revelation in later life that causes them to read an entire library full of highly class-conscious books. It is also clearly not the case that every single instance of participation in a class struggle organisation will generate these beliefs (some forms of trade union collective action do not generate beliefs about the geographically expansive social structure of class but focus narrowly on the experiences in one workplace and among that particular set of workers, for instance).

My claim is thus not that the living political school is the *only* way for individuals to attain to ^(TE) class consciousness, but just that it is one *particularly desirable* such means. And given that there are, currently, insufficient numbers of parents with copies of *Communism for*

¹¹⁶ Having said this, it is important to remember that instrumental motives are widely recognized as key in motivating political participation (Klandermans 2015): individuals typically ask themselves if the benefits likely to result from the exertion of political effort will outweigh the costs. Whilst ^(TE) class consciousness may sometimes be encouraged through mistakes, at some point, victories - even if only minor ones - must begin to mount up for participation in class struggle organisations to be motivationally sustainable for a sizeable chunk of the egalitarian constituency.

Kids and insufficient numbers of individuals committed to reading libraries worth of class-conscious books, generating class consciousness through a living political school arguably appears to be a particularly attractive means for attaining these beliefs.

6.2 Formal education for class consciousness

Class struggle organisations can also be deliberately organised in such a way that they provide a venue for not only informal but also *formal* education for class consciousness. If these organisations make a special effort to be what I am calling *pedagogically oriented*, the effects of generating and strengthening class-conscious beliefs and desires described above will likely be particularly pronounced. What an explicit pedagogic orientation in class struggle organisations looks like is a lot less clear than in the case of informal education, however, because whilst there is a long tradition of such organisations undertaking formal education, this is now a largely forsaken one. I thus begin this section by highlighting some concrete examples of what formal education for class consciousness can and has previously looked like in class struggle organisations, before turning to the question of how this education might be organised in such a way that it raises class consciousness in an all-things-considered transitionally valuable way.

The British economic historian and socialist thinker R. H. Tawney was highly involved in the Workers' Educational Association (WEA), teaching many of those he called "the educationally under-

privileged" about the causes and effects of the Industrial Revolution in England, in the hope that this knowledge would aid their attempts "to mould the society in which they live" (Tawney 1964a, 92). Several other notable British intellectuals, including Harold Laski and Raymond Williams, were also once known for their politically motivated participation in the WEA (Rose 1989).

The wider history of radical politics in the 19th and early 20th centuries is replete with many such examples of political activists engaging in formal pedagogy. The International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, for example, which helped to build a flourishing trade union across differing gender and racial lines during the Great Depression in the US, famously once had leaders who "believed that workers and their representatives needed to understand economics and history on as sophisticated a plane as university students did" (Katz 2011, 93).

Similarly, the Social Democratic Party of Germany - whose members often favoured Wilhelm Liebknecht's slogan "Wissen ist Macht" (knowledge is power) - had a school in Berlin for several years, at which Rosa Luxemburg and other Marxist intellectuals taught political economy and the history of socialism and the labour movement to party members (Jacobs 1978). In doing so, Luxemburg was building on Karl Marx's own forays into worker education, particularly the lectures he gave to The German Workers' Educational Association in London, founded in 1840 (and called by some at the time "the London University for Workers"). In the winter of 1850, Marx

delivered lectures, as Christine Lattek reports, “on the *Communist Manifesto*, on ‘What is Bourgeois Property?’, and on political economy and the principles of communism” to an assembled audience of working-class Londoners (Lattek 2006, 47).

Throughout the 1930s, the “Highlander Folk School” also trained a host of rank-and-file organizers from the Southern labour movement. As Mie Inouye writes, as well as dramatic roleplay:

students took courses on economics, public speaking, history, and current events. They workshopped the problems they faced in their unions, sharing ideas and learning to recognize their own expertise [...] By the end of the 1930s, Highlander staff estimated that they had served about two thousand people [...] Six alumni had been elected presidents of their union locals, twenty-two had become full-time union organizers, and many more had assisted in or directed local union membership drives and strikes (Inouye 2019).

The black liberation movement in the United States also often famously placed a strong emphasis on political education in its quest for racial and economic justice. According to Susane Cope, for instance, among the books most often discussed at Black Panther reading groups and discussion circles were “Mao’s Red Book [...] Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, [...] Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*,

and writings by Malcolm X" (Cope 2022, 82). Cope also notes that the breakfast clubs the Panthers ran for young black children also featured a political education element: "There were lessons about the history of Black people in America and reminders of all that Black people had accomplished despite their centuries of oppression" (Cope 2022, 86).¹¹⁷

We can also find a contemporary example of this political practice in "The World Transformed," a four-day political education festival which has run alongside the UK Labour Party's annual conference since 2016. Participants can attend workshops which conceptualize the complex disadvantages which occur at the intersections of class, race, and gender, or hear from practitioners of the "community organising" approach to political campaigning or attend reading groups which introduce participants to ideas from the tradition of radical political thought (such as Antonio Gramsci on hegemony, or Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau on populism) (Sabbagh 2018). The World Transformed also organises mini-festival events centred around political discussion and debate across the UK, throughout the year. When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, The World Transformed pivoted to online political education, running weekly events during the first lockdown and an entire online conference in 2020.

Another British organisation, *Novara Media*, also utilizes the opportunities of new media technology to live-stream regular

¹¹⁷ For a fascinating historical account of the rise and fall of the "Malcolm X Liberation University" in North Carolina, a further important instance of black liberation-focused activist-led education, see Benson II (2015, particularly chapters 3-5).

discussions and debates between leading political thinkers and academics on a range of salient political issues. For instance, recent hour-long shows discuss media bias with sociologists and journalists and debate public service reform with trade union leaders and economists. Its co-founder describes the shows as "Like a socialist night school. Just not dogmatic" (Judah 2018). The experience of watching or listening to one of the sessions is inevitably more passive than the more active participation called for with in-person education, but the virtual nature of the sessions means the exercise is ordinarily more convenient for people from diverse places and with varying working lives to attend. Participants can still interact with the speakers and put questions to them if watching live, and there seems to be a need for an online presence for organisations seeking to raise class consciousness, given the way inegalitarian misjudgement and conspiracy theories can proliferate online.

Another organisation, Belfast-based *Trademark*, describes itself as "a roving community and workers' college" delivering educational courses on a range of issues in political economy and workplace bargaining (Clancy 2020). The "Betty Sinclair Winter School" that it organises discusses issues like the political causes of austerity, strategies for defeating right-wing populism and issues around campaigning priorities.

Another recent example would be the *Political Education Project*. As organiser Shamime Ibrahim (2022) describes it:

The project was set up by trade unionists, activists, lecturers, and grassroots organisers [and] Its programme covered a wide range of topics, including socialism, women's oppression, anti-racism, the Covid-19 pandemic, climate and capitalist crises, and building working class power. Those attending were exposed to diverse left-wing political analysis within texts, including A Sivanandan's *Communities of Resistance: Writings on Black Struggles for Socialism* and Hal Draper's *The Two Souls of Socialism*, which contributors selected based on their connection to the community efforts they were engaged in.

Finally, *Demand the Impossible* is a free political education program open to young British adults interested in exploring politics beyond the official "A-level" module offered by many schools, and founded in 2012 by two former secondary school teachers, which currently hosts regular summer and evening courses in London, Manchester, and Glasgow. Centred around a series of interactive workshops with guest tutors on pressing political issues and more abstract theoretical debates, the workshops culminate with participants collectively planning and carrying out their own protest action (Shenker 2020, 17-20).

What each of these varied practices do is attempt to create what Tawney calls "the nucleus of a university" in places "where no

university exists" (Tawney 1964b, 77) (or, we might add, where one *does* exist, but which various individuals might be incapable of attending). They provide university-standard research about the history of the class structure, the way in which the class structure is shaped or could be shaped by a variety of important political and economic institutions, and how previous collective attempts to modify (and abolish) the class structure provide lessons for contemporary struggles, which can make the beliefs class-conscious individuals already possess far more sophisticated. Being a pedagogically oriented class struggle organisation thus entails organising and encouraging attendance not just at deliberative discussions which plan collective action, but also at seminars, workshops, reading groups, lectures, and so on, and encouraging formal self-education through books, newspapers, and podcasts.

Participating in formal educational experiences like these - reading and writing exercises, small-group discussion, lectures, all with a series of overt learning objectives - provides greater informational resources to enhance the sophistication of the beliefs and desires integral to egalitarian class consciousness. This is important because there is a range of broad contextual information about the social structure of class, its history and its contemporary dynamics, and the way it intersects with other unjust structures, that it will ordinarily be very hard to conceptualize accurately solely through participation in collective planning and struggle.

Formal settings, along the lines of those discussed in the

examples above, provide spaces in which the beliefs generated through collective action and deliberation can be empirically substantiated, and generally made less rudimentary. For instance, formal education can provide concrete information about the extent to which the power possibility space of the disadvantaged is constrained by the class structure, real world emancipatory modifications that have previously happened to the class structure, and the exact shape and nature of the capitalist class.

Despite several recent examples which indicate a resurgence of interest in formal education for class consciousness, there is no denying that these practices are - on the whole - increasingly rare and marginalized ones. The many political parties that once engaged in these efforts as a matter of course are now primarily well-oiled parliamentary machines, focused narrowly on increasing their vote share at the next election, and thus unlikely to offer any political education to their members beyond some basic canvassing training. And the trade unions and other organisations (such as the WEA) that once encouraged their members to expand their intellectual capacities to enhance their ability to act politically, now tend to offer almost solely vocational education narrowly tied to improving their members' productivity and prospects on the labour market (Goldman 1995, 248ff).

As Katrina Forrester notes, for instance, for most of the UK Labour party's history, it has "advocated impartial public education provision by governments, rather than education for socialism by

voluntary organizations or party-affiliated groups" (Forrester 2021, 135; cf. Nairn 1964, 51). Yates also points out that "[m]ost unions in the United States have little or no member education." (Yates 2018, 147).¹¹⁸ My claim is thus that, given the way in which a pedagogic orientation can facilitate the generation and strengthening of class consciousness, that there is a strong case for class struggle organisations attempting to reverse the relative marginalization of this practice today and to once again start overtly engaging in activist-led education.

There is of course a worry that members of the egalitarian constituency won't have sufficiently robust motivations to continue participating in class struggle organisations long enough for the requisite process of epistemic transformation to really play out. Essentially, if the epistemically transformative process of attaining class consciousness takes time, how can we be sure that enough members of the egalitarian constituency will continue to show up with sufficient frequency for this transformation to play out? A complete answer to this question clearly requires future on-the-ground empirical research, but before moving on, I want to offer here some theoretical reasons that provide a presumptive case in favour of the practice's potential sustainability.

One important point to make in any discussion of sustaining

¹¹⁸ During his ethnographic research with immigrant workers in the United States, Paul Apostolidis describes a particularly revealing encounter he had with a meatpacker frustrated with his union bureaucracy. Esteban Múñoz expresses his frustration that the "old guard" of the union, "never gave us a meeting or said, "Come learn this; we're going to teach you this" (Apostolidis 2010, 189).

political motivations is that it is not necessary for class struggle organisations to be modelled on the old Leninist model that expects “complete devotion” to the cause. These organisations need not be premised upon creating a kind of participant who must break with most of the other existing desires and commitments they have. Rather than acting like what Michael Walzer calls “old Christians”, the organisations can be sensitive to “the day-to-day hedonism of ordinary men and women”, by making space within their activities for recreation and socializing (Walzer 1970, 235). And in much the same way as the history of radical politics in the 19th and 20th century provides plentiful examples for what formal education for class consciousness could look like, so does this history provide examples of what class struggle organisations that make space for recreation could look like.

James Muldoon, for instance, reports on the way in which the German SDP’s activities once extended far beyond the political party understood in a narrow sense, and included “sports teams [...] choirs, beer halls, and nature walking clubs” (Muldoon 2020, 137). Perhaps this model now seems too ambitious, but even just scheduling regular social events and pub trips can be a way for these organisations to insert themselves into the daily life of their participants. For class struggle organisations to make space for these kinds of activities is a way to not demand too much from participants and recognize the limits to their political commitment.

Even when the organisations are set up in this way, however, there is no getting around the fact that attending trade union or party

meetings, participating in collective class struggle, and attending political education festivals are still *costly activities*. Most obviously, time spent participating in these activities is time not spent doing other worthwhile things, but these activities are also often *hard work*, which means they will often appear particularly costly compared to - say - just watching *The Simpsons* on television. Some of the most important costs that participants in these activities are likely to incur include: missed opportunities for socializing, for spending time with family, for relaxation and recreation, some financial costs (such as transportation costs) and even potentially, in a capitalist society, costs of *social stigma* attached to choosing to operate in a class conscious way.¹¹⁹ What I want to claim is that pedagogically oriented class struggle organisations can nonetheless be structured in a way that tends to incentivize repeat participation. They can do this by providing a range of *goods* to members that reduce (or potentially offset entirely) the costs attached to political activity (Meadowcroft and Marrow 2017).

One such good they can supply is a feeling of increased self-worth and individual fulfilment. If one feels that one is doing something worthwhile, such as contributing to a worthy cause, one is likely more

¹¹⁹ During my time as an undergraduate, I spent a brief period participating in weekly 'paper sales' for a small Trotskyist organisation in London. During these paper sales, I was often shunned by passers-by in a way that had almost nothing to do with the political *content* of the newspaper I was attempting to sell. To spend time dedicating oneself to a political cause of any kind was, in the eyes of many, to belong to the same social group as the religious fanatics and conspiracy theorists with whom we were often competing for space in town centres and outside train stations.

willing to bear the costs involved. Participation in class struggle is a form of proactive activity: it is a significant way to gain a sense of oneself as *taking responsibility* for the shape of one's life, of taking control, rather than passively submitting to the conditions gifted to oneself by employers or structural factors. This good is particularly likely to be supplied by class struggle organisations when there are precious few other avenues in society by which individuals can obtain these feelings, such as, most obviously, a limited range of opportunities to engage in meaningful work.

Another closely related good is self-confidence or self-efficacy. Deliberative participation in pedagogically oriented class struggle organisations can improve one's ability to articulate oneself to others, to coordinate group actions, to defuse conflict and bridge divides, to understand and utilize abstract concepts, and the interpersonal and civic skills necessary for political activity of essentially any kind (Gastil 2018, 284; Han 2014, 105ff; Knobloch and Gastil, 2014).

A final good is group solidarity or community. Feeling oneself to be united with others by common beliefs, experiences, and goals, provides an affective bond of companionship that can also offset the individual costs attached to participation.¹²⁰ As Forrester notes, this is

¹²⁰ Although deep and sustained disagreement among members of class struggle organisations is likely to weaken these solidary bonds, accessing feelings of solidarity does not necessitate that there must be complete agreement among the group. Taylor makes a useful distinction between *executive* and *subsidiary* interests: “[a]s long as the group's executive interest is shared, conflict in subsidiary interests present no threat to solidarity” (Taylor 2015, 132).

one reason to think that in-person participation in pedagogically oriented class struggle organisations is more motivationally sustainable than purely digital participation. Whilst a purely digital model can potentially work “well for building relations between leaders and members”, recent history appears to demonstrate that it is far “less suited to developing the relations that *keep movements going*” (Forrester 2021, 134).

Of particular interest to pedagogically oriented class struggle organisations, I think, ought to be the old Anarchist idea of an “affinity group”. Murray Bookchin describes these groups as a collective, of usually about twelve individuals “who are no less concerned with their human relationships than with their social goals” (Bookchin 1986, 21-2). Affinity groups are essentially a “type of extended family” based on a relatively small number of “tight-knit and “deeply empathetic human relationships” (1969). Bookchin’s compelling claim is that keeping the core unit of political organisation relatively small allows “for the greatest degree of intimacy between those who compose it” (Bookchin 1969). These relatively small-scale political organs are a very effective way to foster the requisite “self-discipline” needed to participate in politics and to foster a desire for “deep personal involvement” (Bookchin 1969). This certainly does not mean that *no* larger groups of class struggle organisations should ever form, but just that an overt focus on decentralisation and personal intimacy in organisational design can help sustain a motivation to participate: rather than an anonymous leader or organisational bureaucrat making commands and

requests, a desire to play a role in organisational work emerges more organically from one's personal bond with a small group of close friends.

When the organisations are set up in such a way that they provide all or some of these goods, as White and Ypi note, it is possible that they not only *sustain* individual motivation levels, but also potentially *enhance* them: as solidary bonds, or feelings of individual confidence in one's political capacities grow, individuals perhaps come to have further incentives to continue showing up into the future (White and Ypi 2016, 83).

6.3 Avoiding impermissibility risks

To make a compelling case for formal education being an important part of the answer to the question of how consciousness-raising should take place, we need to know not only that class struggle organisations can be arranged in such a way that they effectively inculcate the relevant beliefs and desires in their participants, but also that this process of consciousness-raising can be achieved *permissibly*. Recall now our discussion of certain permissibility risks involved in generating participatory intent from the last chapter. There, I claimed that what matters for the transitional value of raising-consciousness is not *just* that beliefs are changed in a way that is feasibility-enhancing, but also that this is achieved in a way that is compatible with what we morally owe to one another. How exactly could the formal education

taking place in class struggle organisations be arranged in such a way that it is not merely feasibility-enhancing but also morally permissible, and in particular respects *epistemic agency*?

In my view, the same two permissibility risks apply as with organising conversations: the prospect of inculcating either false or misleading beliefs. Consider again, for instance, an activist-educator implanting what I called the *Zionist conspiracy belief* in others during a formal pedagogic interaction, causing them to believe that the cause of socialism and peace in the Middle East is consciously obstructed by a formal organization of Jewish financial and political elites. Activist-educators should certainly work to ensure that the beliefs they try to inculcate and the information they share tracks enduring features of empirical reality and thus are not falsehoods like the *Zionist conspiracy belief*.

One way to avoid this particular risk of implanting conspiracy beliefs is to place an emphasis in the education not on individual capitalists as *just* bad people, but rather on the view that it is *where the hostile individual is placed in the structure* that is contributing to their decision to act in unjust ways. If class is best understood as a social structure, then class consciousness must be *structural* consciousness. Thankfully, there are many decades of rigorous social scientific work on the many ways in which the class structure disadvantages and advantages different officeholders within it on which they can draw.

Consider also the risk of misleading. I think it is often an ethical opposition to generating misleading beliefs in others that is at the root

of various worries that proponents of an “intersectional” approach to social stratification typically have about attempts to raise class consciousness. There is a fear from intersectional sections of the left that agents with class consciousness will hold to these beliefs about the class structure monomaniacally, thereby excluding from view various other important forms and systems of oppression.¹²¹

For example, Lukács sometimes writes as if class conscious beliefs will always be the most appropriate form of political consciousness in all social settings, with no experience the individual could have would ever causing them to doubt the relevance of their beliefs about the class structure to their decisions about how to act in a given situation. The reason Lukács seems to assume that his version of class consciousness is the only kind of political consciousness human agents will ever need to act politically is that he feels that this consciousness provides “knowledge of the whole”, an awareness of the social totality (Lukács 1971e [1919], 20). Class-conscious beliefs, for Lukács, provide the sole appropriate lens through which to analyse and evaluate the social totality. Almost all issues in the agent’s life – personal, political, social – are ultimately best viewed through the lens of Leninist-Marxist class consciousness. There are thus *very few* situations where the beliefs associated with his conception of class

¹²¹ Of course, there is reasonable disagreement about how much beliefs about the power-consequential nature of the class structure explains, relative to other consequential social structures. But there are clear cases where class consciousness-raising will fail to meet this permissibility condition, and be misleading, regardless of this reasonable disagreement.

consciousness should not be robustly action-guiding.

But trying to analyse a social phenomenon like femicide, for instance (and what ought to be done about it) *solely* through the lens of a form of *class* consciousness, is likely to lead to a series of actions (or indeed a period of inaction) that does not sufficiently uphold egalitarian moral norms. For example, individuals employing class conscious beliefs might be tempted to think that it is ultimately the social structure of class that is responsible for the instrumentalizing attitude many men possess towards women, and that this cannot be adequately tackled until the class structure itself is transformed, and potentially even that discussion of and focus on “identity” issues will negatively impact the class struggle. Whilst these thoughts are not the *inevitable* outcome of possessing forms of class consciousness, we can see that there is a way in which possessing these beliefs tends to encourage such a stance, if they are the *only* robustly action-guiding beliefs individuals hold.

Taking due care to avoid misleading thus means the activist-educator needs to be acutely alert to the fact that sometimes *other beliefs* and particularly *other* forms of structural political consciousness, ought to be more central to the political reasoning of participants in class struggle organisations than class conscious beliefs. Agents can – and should - possess *multiple forms* of oppositional egalitarian consciousness – environmental consciousness, anti-racist consciousness, and feminist consciousness– and different social settings should generally make these different kinds of oppositional

consciousness more or less salient to one's desires and motivations (Mansbridge 2001, 5).¹²² When it comes to the question of whether to approve of, participate in, or help organise a trade union strike action, it seems clear how class conscious beliefs and desires should be occurrent. But for *other* forms of political decision making: "how should I respond to seeing police harassing black youths on the street?", "how should I respond to reading the news of my local MP making sexist remarks in parliament?", and so on, it certainly makes sense for other kinds of oppositional consciousness to be more occurrent. To not be misleading, educators in class struggle organisations thus ought to pay very close attention to all other structures of oppression and seek to raise consciousness about these too.

A third risk also now enters the picture, however, because activist-led education takes place over a lengthier time than a single or even multiple organising conversations. A final permissibility condition on activist-led education is thus that consciousness-raisers ought to

¹²² It might be objected that possessing a form of class consciousness is *necessarily* incompatible with possessing other kinds of oppositional consciousness. But this appears to be a mistake. According to Group Empathy Theory, for example, because an individual with one kind of oppositional consciousness has some "practice at empathizing" with members of their own group, they are then more able to recognize when members of other groups face similar experiences and are *more able to take their perspective, identify with and support their struggles* (Sirin et al. 2021, 37-8). This is because the particular cognitive habits one has as a result of coming to possess one kind of oppositional consciousness seems to provide individuals with the cognitive skills that make them more likely to empathize with certain groups situated outside of the immediate group itself, predisposing them to also develop other forms of oppositional consciousness (O'Brien 2008, 11).

also take due care to avoid causing others to take on *closed-minded* beliefs, that is, beliefs which are unresponsive to new information (Callan and Arena 2009).

Closed-minded belief-holders display a kind of rigid, emotional investment in the truth of their beliefs, lacking the motivation to consider available evidence or arguments sufficiently when this would lead them to revise these beliefs. Even when agents take due care to ensure they only foster true and non-misleading beliefs, they can still be liable to moral blame: people can be *indoctrinated* in a way that we think objectionable, *regardless* of whether they are indoctrinated into the truth or not. Again, I think the reason for this is that there is something incompatible with regarding agents as equally capable of making up their own minds about what to think and seeking to make them uncritically attached to some belief that the consciousness-raiser happens to favour. Belief-holders should be able to consider alternatives to the beliefs they subscribe to, and offer reasons for holding them.

The central part of respecting the epistemic agency of one's fellow participants in a class struggle organisation requires, I think, making a special effort not only to generate the beliefs central to class consciousness, but *also* to inculcate and strengthen what I will call a *reflective disposition*: this is a useful way to ensure that belief-holders are capable of determining for themselves which beliefs might be true and misleading, and to avoid possessing closed-minded beliefs. For an agent to possess a reflective disposition, on my account, is for them to

be reliably or robustly motivated to impose a temporary level of distance from their beliefs, to consider alternatives to them, and to evaluate their origins and validity (Christman 2005, 331; Macedo 1990, 269). What distinguishes a disposition from a bare capacity is that when an agent possesses a reflective disposition, their use of the capacity has become habitual, or what Callan calls “second nature” (Callan 2002, 126).¹²³

To be clear, when an individual deploys their reflective capacity this does not mean detaching themselves completely from their personal experiences, sense of their own interests, and gaining a completely objective view on them. Certainly, it doesn’t seem wholly unreasonable to, as Christman puts it, “leave some room for the unreflective and the automatic in life,” as in, for instance, one’s commitments to friends, loved ones, and various cultural artefacts (Christman 2009, 140). Rather, what a reflective disposition entails is attempting this detachment *every now and then*. Thus, on the account I offer, possessing a reflective disposition is certainly still compatible with holding relatively resolutely to certain beliefs.

The idea that the beliefs and desires central to class consciousness, for instance, cannot be robustly action-guiding if we occasionally reflect on them and their merits is highly doubtful. As Callan notes, “the detachability of commitment is not the same as

¹²³ Callan sometimes uses the term “reflective virtue” rather than my own preferred term, “reflective disposition.” Ultimately, not much seems to hang on which of these phrases we use. What matters is that we understand the ways in which the exercise of capacities comes to be a part of the agent’s *character*.

superficiality" (Callan 1997, 59). In fact - as Paul Weithman points out - a reflective disposition is often "necessary to sustain" adherence to even relatively unreflective beliefs in the first place (Weithman 2014, 256). In many cases, absent the habit of occasionally distancing oneself from these beliefs, one is likely to be deprived of reasons for thinking them well founded, and thereby less likely to act on them. A *reflective* disposition is not the same, in short, as a *noncommittal* one. It is possible to be so reflective that - to borrow a phrase from Bertold Brecht - one's "only action is to vacillate", even in emergency situations that require immediate decisions (Brecht 1976 [1939], 336). But there is no necessary connection between a reflective disposition and perpetual vacillation of this sort.

It is hard to say with any degree of certainty *exactly what* activist-educators ought to do in a given pedagogic moment to inculcate this reflective capacity, as most likely there are a *spectrum* of acceptable pedagogical techniques that fall with the range of permissible practices. But what seems clear is that two broad aspects of the formal educational experience are absolutely key.

First parties, movements and unions should be organised in such a way that there are plentiful opportunities for participants to *practice* *deploying* their reflective capacities. Absent frequent deployment opportunities, an individual's reflective disposition will remain underutilized or even entirely latent. Individuals will likely just prefer the comfort of their current commitments to pursuing contradictory information or feel deeply intellectually infallible. But, if pedagogically

oriented class struggle organisations provide spaces where individuals can think critically about political issues through writing, discussion, and reading, they can help create the *habit* of utilization, making the persistent utilization of one's reflective capacities more likely. As J.S. Mill famously put it in *On Liberty*, the "human faculties [...] are *improved only by being used*" (Mill 2015 [1859], 58, emphasis added). Participants can come to possess the necessary feelings of confidence in their abilities required to make deployment of the capacity a live option, and value its regular use.

Access to plentiful opportunities for the deployment of one's reflective disposition, so that its use can become second nature, is thus clearly a necessary condition for the achievement of a strengthened reflective disposition in activist-led education programs. Providing opportunities for the exercise of reflective capacities is not, it is important to note, entirely incompatible with degrees of hierarchy and power imbalances in the activist-classroom. Individual participants do not have to be entirely controlling their educational experience for themselves: they can still be led by others at various points and in various ways. But what providing these opportunities does appear to be incompatible with is an activist-classroom that makes literally *no* space for student influence, that is, where participants are simply subjected to the pre-determined plans of an all-powerful educator.

Second, parties, movements and unions should be organised in such a way that they both emphasize and encourage *intellectual humility*. In formal educational settings, this means that activist-

teachers must make clear to participants that they are fallible, that the subject matter is complex and controversial and definitive answers are hard to establish. This emphasis also involves teachers being seen to display a continuous curiosity: seeking to keep up with intellectual innovations in the subject one teaches and applying the standards of rational inquiry to all the content covered.

Emphasizing intellectual humility means not simply paying lip service to certain controversies and reasonable disagreements but actively exposing students to competing perspectives. It means being keen to study differing points of view and being able to point students to the work of dissenting and critical voices. Activist-teachers should also make it known that they welcome critical questioning of every aspect of what is being presented or discussed (or occluded), and an emphasis should be placed more generally on the pedagogic relation as one of collective discovery and learning, rather than preaching.¹²⁴ Without this emphasis, participants are more likely to create a habit of political *deference*, rather than one of utilizing their own reflective disposition.

As well as emphasizing their *own* intellectual humility, activist-teachers must also make serious efforts to encourage intellectual humility on the part of the student-participants in the practice. This involves reminding students that they are susceptible to error in their

¹²⁴ As Schouten puts it in a slightly different context, pupils in educational settings should “be enthusiastically welcomed to dissent” (Schouten 2022, 16).

analysis, and that they ought to question their own views and those they are exposed to in the classroom. Students should be encouraged to do their own research and contribute where they disagree or have their doubts. Teachers should, in short, make efforts to encourage participants to direct their critical scrutiny towards the very content being taught, and to ensure that they feel confident engaging in such scrutiny. Without this encouragement, participants are more likely to be over-satisfied with their current views than they are to possess the desire to distance themselves from their own commitments in the way required by a reflective disposition.

Notice that this intellectual humility condition is certainly not the same as a *neutrality* proviso. It does not require that the educator expose pupils to *the same amount* of content from all perspectives, giving equal weight to every concern from every point on the ideological spectrum. As Kyla Ebels-Duggan points out, given limited resources of various kinds, educators must always make certain decisions about “which matters to take to be settled [...] what alternatives to consider, [and] what to regard as plausible,” (Ebels-Duggan 2014, 271). But an activist-teacher can fail to meet the neutrality condition in these ways, so long as efforts are made in their pedagogy to emphasize and encourage intellectual humility at the same time, and plentiful opportunities are available for participants to question the material covered in class. The humility condition does not bind so tightly that it calls for teachers to leave all their political commitments at the door. To demand of education for class

consciousness that it abides by a neutrality proviso would be to mistakenly apply the same standard to activist-led education for adults operating on a voluntary basis in civil society that one would apply to state-directed schooling for children or young adults. It is sensible to presume that the usual neutrality restrictions that apply to state schooling are relaxed somewhat when the education is optional, rather than compulsory, and for adults, rather than children.

Ultimately, the participants in the practice ought to be able to choose where to spend their free time (assuming of course, that the organising conversations that generated the participatory intent in the first place were themselves not coercive or misleading somehow). The worry cannot simply be that the plentiful information to which they are exposed will have a political slant of some kind, as this kind of worry would extend to most of the films, books, radio, and television that citizens will more or less freely consume. Within the range of practices that live up to the humility proviso, there is an acceptable *range* of political slant. We just want, as participants in these practices, to feel in with a suitably good chance of being able to note its slant, identify it, and think about its plausibility. I think that activist-led education that provides both plentiful informational resources and opportunities for deployment and which encourages and emphasizes humility falls within this range of acceptability.

Of course, this section leaves many questions unanswered or underexplored. For instance: what kind of balance of pedagogic activities and curricular content best enables teachers to meet the

conditions delineated above? How *exactly* should the sessions be structured for maximum effectiveness? What content exactly should be covered? How many participants is optimal? Where should the sessions be hosted? Is virtual activist-led education (particularly important when social distancing measures prevent face-to-face discussion, and given the way political misjudgement can proliferate online) adequate for meeting these conditions, or is there something uniquely valuable about in-person interaction? Are activist-teachers best able to live up to these conditions if they are drawn primarily from the ranks of professional educators, who have received formal teacher-training of some kind? Or is the receipt of such formal training not a necessary condition of being able to educate in a transitionally valuable way?¹²⁵ As I have stated at various points, however, my goal is to provide an *embryonic* theory of transition, rather than an exhaustive one. I thus hope to have drawn attention to several *particularly important features* of a complete theory of transition and provided some presumptive reasons in favour of the permissibility and effectiveness of an oft-overlooked practice.

¹²⁵ My own suspicion, which may or may not survive empirical testing, is that the ideal profile of the activist educator is someone with both (a) *some* professional experience educating but also (b) plentiful experience participating in movement and party politics. Teachers who consider themselves simply as “professionals”, and who have little practice of campaigning and struggle (with their “head in the clouds”, as the saying goes), seem just as unlikely to be able to successfully lead sessions in these fora as seasoned activists who lack any formal educational training.

6.4 Will educators respect these permissibility conditions?

At this point, it might be retorted that on the ground activist educators are highly unlikely to be motivated to ensure these various normative guidelines (which stipulate the importance of avoiding inculcating false, misleading or closed-minded beliefs) are met. Will the leaders of these pedagogically oriented class struggle organisations possess the requisite motivational profile to raise consciousness in such a way that it is all-things-considered transitionally valuable? Whilst it is *logically possible* to imagine instances of activist-led education of the kind that I have described, won't real, actual, on-the-ground activist-educators be highly unlikely to possess the requisite motivational profile to educate in this way? Won't *actual* activist-teachers under present political conditions be motivated to *break* the conditions specified above and, in fact, conduct education which results in indoctrination, rather than a strengthened reflective disposition? Essentially, we might worry that even if we can construct forms of class struggle education in our mind that place an emphasis on encouraging a reflective disposition, actual concrete instances of class struggle education are highly unlikely to play out in this way, because of the political incentives that activist-educators will face.

My claim in this section is that there are reasons to be sceptical

that the delicate balancing of ends that permissible activist-led education requires is either categorically impossible, or avoidable, in the way these objectors might press. The first point to make in response to this objection is that we should not exaggerate the risks of events playing out in this way, assuming, for instance, that activist-educators have a partisan-politically-motivated reason to teach in an indoctrinating fashion, and an independent moral reason grounded in respect for the agency of others *not* to teach in that way. It is not the case that the partisan-political reasons activist-educators will possess all weigh on the 'indoctrination' side of the activist-teacher's dilemma in the way that this makes out. In fact, activist-educators are often likely to recognise that being an effective teacher will often require ensuring non-indoctrination.¹²⁶

One reason why it is not unreasonable to expect activist-leaders to be so motivated is that fostering closed-minded beliefs is also likely to be transitionally *ineffective*. Political actors are always subject to the whims of what Machiavelli called *fortuna* – forces beyond the control of agents that have unanticipated consequences to which the actor must respond and adapt. This means that - when members of the citizenry hold their class-conscious beliefs inflexibly and become unresponsive to new information - they are unlikely to act in the kinds of ways most likely to radically advance egalitarian social change because they miss and do not calibrate their actions to these new circumstances. Political

¹²⁶ I am grateful to Callum MacRae for expressing things to me in this way.

conditions are in a state of constant flux, so the terrain on which the egalitarian constituency must act on its class-conscious beliefs is always shifting. If class conscious beliefs become closed-minded, the citizenry will end up using the framework of the past to analyse new events and thereby, at least some of the time, miss their novelty. If indoctrination involves becoming unable to process information that appears to contradict existing beliefs in some way, then indoctrination will often be strategically unwise for those seeking radical change, given the unreliability of fixed beliefs in a constantly changing political context.

But having said this, I still think the educator motivation worry is right to point out that activist-teachers may well come to be faced with situations in which they might consider it politically advantageous for the inculcation of closed-minded belief to occur. This is because the activist-educator has *two* aims in the classroom, rather than—as is typical for, for instance, most state-led educators—one: they have a narrowly pedagogic goal (of trying to cultivate a reflective disposition), but also a substantive political goal (of trying to further the egalitarian cause). The first goal leads to a desire on the part of the activist-teachers to uphold the conditions delineated above, but the second goal potentially leads to a desire to fail to uphold the three conditions when it is politically unwise to do so.

Because, very roughly, unity tends to increase political power, it might strike activist-educators as politically advantageous to inculcate closed-minded beliefs in at least some areas, rather than observe the conditions on a reflective disposition cultivating activist-led education

highlighted above. If participants in activist-led education were to come to display a kind of rigid, emotional investment in the truth of certain political positions, for instance, they could potentially come to be motivated to contribute in greater ways to the project of egalitarian social change. If they were to come to lack the motivation to consider available evidence or arguments sufficiently when this would lead them to revise these commitments, this may make them less prone to political disillusion, disagreement, and confusion. These are some of the kinds of *homogenizing pressures* likely to be felt by any activist engaged in a project of social change.¹²⁷

For an activist-educator to cease pursuing their substantive political goals, when doing so runs the risk of inculcating closed-minded belief, clearly involves a delicate and demanding balancing of ends on the part of activist-teachers. Constraining the pursuit of one's substantive political goals, insofar as this pursuit becomes incompatible with upholding a duty of respect, will certainly not be easy. However, it is not clear to me that the delicate balancing of ends required of activist-teachers is particularly *more* demanding than many of the other political practices which activists successfully engage in.

For example, in a fascinating discussion, Andrew Sabl discusses the "*delicate psychic balancing acts* that seem necessary for good

¹²⁷ Activist work is very emotionally demanding, so we should also note, in passing, the possibility of activist burnout or "emotional exhaustion" causing activist-educators to lack the requisite motivational profile. For more on the concept of emotional exhaustion in activist circles, see Peña, Meier and Nah (2021).

organising" (Sabl 2002, 272, emphasis added). Facilitating productive political meetings, for instance, often involves a great deal of patience on the part of the activist, and a certain amount of restraint in pursuing one's own agenda. One must resist the urge to take over, and to be dogmatic, *even when one thinks doing so could plausibly speed up the success of one's political cause*. Activists on community canvasses, to use another example, must similarly resist the temptation to just lie or pretend they have answers when they don't, *even when doing so could plausibly advance their political aims*. Even though choosing not to engage in these kinds of behaviour might set back one's political cause, many activists choose to act in this way to treat their fellow citizens in morally appropriate ways.

To do activism, then, often just *is* to engage in precisely these kinds of balancing acts: resisting urges and reining in one's behaviour to act in accordance with one's duties. If activists can successfully acquire the distinct disposition of character Sabl thinks is necessary for other forms of political practice, what stops the complex balancing of ends required in permissible activist-led education from being similarly achievable? It thus seems rash to think that achievement of this balancing is simply out of the question.

Interestingly, there does also seem to be some evidence that the educators involved in previous instances of the practice were often highly attuned to the importance of achieving this delicate balancing. For example, Tawney writes of the importance he attached to trying to "draw as many as possible of the partialities in" rather than chasing "all

the partialities out" of his activist-teaching (Tawney 1964a, 90).

Tawney's comments about learning from his pupils further suggest that he was disposed in the right kind of respectful way towards them: he once wrote that he "can never be sufficiently grateful for the lessons learned from the adult students whom I was supposed to teach, but who, in fact, taught me" (Tawney 1964a, 91).

It might further be objected that, even if not outright unachievable, the moral dangers involved are such that the practice is still best avoided. However, this position only seems attractive if a plausible *alternative* candidate for educating for class consciousness and a reflective disposition can be offered. One such commonly floated candidate is expanding state-led and state-sanction education, such as greater political education in schools and universities.¹²⁸ Before concluding therefore, I intend to briefly examine this further possible objection to the transitional value of activist-led education.

There may well be some good reasons for thinking that dramatic changes in the way that liberal states deliver education (such as expanding citizenship lessons) is a *more ideal* way to strengthen a reflective disposition, and even a certain kind of class consciousness,

¹²⁸ For instance, Meira Levinson makes a case for greater "action civics" in the high school classroom, as a way to "foster [...] attention to systemic issues" like economic inequality among the young and provide concrete experiences of trying to change oppressive social structures (Levinson 2012, 220). For another fascinating argument that university educators ought to seek to raise "egalitarian consciousness" among their students (understood as a disposition to remake the basic structure of unjust societies), see Schouten (2022). Maïa Pal (2022) has also recently called for higher education lecturers to teach students what she calls "the dark side of employability."

without encountering the indoctrination worry. For one thing, there is likely to be more institutional oversight in state-led education, which can guard against the freedom of the teacher to engage in the kinds of practices where activist-teachers have far greater individual prerogative (although - having said this - it is also important not to be starry-eyed about the ways in which *state* education can itself often functioned as a complex form of indoctrination: it is not as if state-led education would represent a failsafe guard against the indoctrination worry (Willis 2016 [1977])¹²⁹). Reforms to state-directed education would certainly also reach a larger number of individuals than even the most ambitious activist-led practices are likely to and would be able to both reach a greater number of the most disadvantaged, as well as intervening in their lives at a much earlier - and therefore educationally more crucial - time.

However, holding resolutely to this position regarding the

¹²⁹ Paglayan (2022) also argues that the primary origins of large-scale state-led education reside in a desire to prevent civil disorder and inculcate obedience and beliefs in state legitimacy, finding an increase in primary education expansion in the aftermath of civil wars in both Europe and South America. See also, for further discussion, Lorna Finlayson's experience of the so-called "hidden curriculum" during her own schooling: "There was no plausible pedagogical reason why we should wear shirts with collars, or tuck our shirts into our trousers. Why we shouldn't put our hands in our pockets or fold our arms. Why we should address the people who taught us as Mr, Mrs, or Sir – long after the habit had more or less died out in the wider community. The lesson conveyed by the enforcement of these practices, to which a vast amount of time and energy was devoted, was about power. We were taught that what happened to us was not up to us, but that things would be better and easier if we submitted to authority. The fact that the instructions we were given were often arbitrary, even irrational, made them a perfect means of driving this lesson home" (Finlayson 2021).

desirability of *only* state-led education given the risks of activist educators possessing the requisite motivational profile denies two highly salient facts. First, it denies that there is a fairly high chance that the state encouraging a more activist bent to the education of its citizens could, if implemented carelessly or under politically polarised conditions, result in high levels of backlash and thus be all-things-considered undesirable from an egalitarian perspective. As Gina Schouten argues, the value of these kinds of state-led educational projects “rests largely on its value externalities [...] if educating students for a critical orientation toward institutions had offsetting pernicious effects [...] this could undercut our justification for it” (Schouten 2022, 20).¹³⁰

Second, and perhaps most importantly, is that it denies what we might term the contemporary reality of ideological state-capture. There are few, if any, signs in recent state education policy in the advanced capitalist nations that anything like the vast expansion of state-led and state sanctioned political education that would be necessary to generate and strengthen class consciousness and a reflective disposition is remotely possible in the near-to-distant future. The idea of the state encouraging popular participation in political life for the betterment of democracy, for instance, goes against the grain of a now deeply embedded governing logic that conceives of education

¹³⁰ A further potential advantage of activist-led education programs aiming to raise egalitarian consciousness is that they potentially appeal to at least some liberals who nonetheless reject the idea that the state should play such a (supposedly) “partisan” role in educating its citizens.

increasingly as a method for improving employer-friendly skills and dispositions that enhance the value of capital (Brown 2015).

To implement the idealized form of state-led education preferred by many would require a decisive break with the entire ruling rationality of our times: current incentives, aims, and understandings about the reach of government would have to be fundamentally challenged and disputed, and the level of resources directed towards schooling and university education would have to be radically increased. In other words, then, the many constraints facing attempts to implement a turbo-charged social democracy, property-owning democracy or liberal socialist state are in fact much the same for massively expanding the state education sector. For answers to the questions of egalitarian transition to be insightful, and politically relevant, particular attention thus needs to be paid to forms of political action which do not assume control of the liberal state. This is because, in many cases, lack of access to the levers of state power is *precisely the problem that needs to be overcome*.

It is thus not clear that there is an alternative path open which is less prone to the indoctrination worry than activist-led education efforts, in the way some objectors might press. It does not seem an appropriate response, then, if one cares about the goods that state-led education *could* potentially come to secure, to merely wait for an opportunity for children and young adults to finally gain access to them,

given how unlikely this currently looks.¹³¹ We must also add at this point that as well as there arguably not being an alternative path open at the present moment, the forces of the political right are busy investing resources of their own in education for (both transformative and conservative) inegalitarian forms of class consciousness:

numerous summer schools, fellowship programs, and think tanks on the right [...] teach a curriculum of canonical texts, often with the intent of countering what they perceive as a threatening leftist consensus in universities. Some of these, like the “Publius Fellowship” for advanced college students and recent graduates at the Claremont Institute, and the libertarian Mercatus Center at George Mason University, which now funds “Adam Smith Fellowships” for graduate students, were founded in the late 1970s and early ’80s as conservatives took the reins of political power. Others started more recently; the Christian conservative John Jay Institute began teaching constitutional and theological texts to its graduate fellows in 2005, and the Hertog Foundation established Political Studies and War Studies programs for college students in 2010 and 2013. These programs represent distinct

¹³¹ Sally Haslanger has made a similar claim that we ought not to focus “our political efforts [...] entirely on the possibilities of state action and other policy changes” (Haslanger 2017, 151).

strands of right-wing thought. The Mercatus Center trains students in the classical liberal thought of Adam Smith and the later “Austrian, Virginia and Bloomington schools of political economy” with the goal of shaping future teaching and scholarship [...] these programs share a model of political education: *to train small numbers of young people entering politics, journalism, law, and the military in conservative ideas* (Brown 2021, emphasis added).

In other words, political adversaries of radical egalitarian social change are themselves using activist- and state- led education to further their cause, heightening the force of the claim that there is currently no other available option than to seek to create formal and informal education for ^(TE) class consciousness, despite the difficult motivational profile it involves if it is to be conducted permissibly. As well as not appearing definitively unachievable, activist attempts to attain this motivational balancing themselves, without recourse to the state, thus also strike me as essentially unavoidable under present political conditions.

Alternative practices that do not face the same difficulty, but which can achieve the same end, just do not appear to be available.

While clearly far from conclusive, I think that these remarks demonstrate that there are not good grounds to conclude that activist-teachers’ possession of a substantive political goal is simply incompatible with their ability to successfully uphold a duty of respect

towards their pupils. The educator motivation worry is not so strong that it ought to prevent proponents of egalitarian social change from even entertaining this practice as a means of transitional politics.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has argued that it is participation of members of the egalitarian constituency in what I call *pedagogically oriented class struggle organisations* that is best suited to effectively and permissibly generating the belief-desire complex central to ^(TE) class consciousness.

The paradigmatic examples of class struggle organisations that I referred to throughout this chapter were political parties, trade unions, and social movements that aim to realize egalitarian transformations of the class structure. The chapter highlighted two main reasons why such organisations are well-suited to generating the transitionally valuable kind of class consciousness. On the one hand, under certain conditions, experiences of participating in class struggle organisations will often involve the kind of *informal education* that can generate and strengthen the belief-desire complex central to ^(TE) class consciousness. On the other, if such organisations also make a concerted effort to engage in *formal education* of various sorts – providing information and concerted opportunities to learn it through discussion, writing and application - this can also play a role in generating the belief-desire complex central to ^(TE) class consciousness.

I then moved on to deal with an important worry about the

prospects for these organisations permissibly generating the right kind of class consciousness under present political conditions. I claimed that activist educators can permissibly inculcate class conscious beliefs provided they place an emphasis on the simultaneous inculcation of what I called reflective capacity. There is a further worry which concerns whether leaders of class struggle organisations can possess the requisite dispositions to ensure that this kind of class consciousness is in fact raised in an all-things-considered permissible way. But I claimed that there were reasons to be sceptical that the delicate balancing of ends that desirable activist-led education requires is either categorically unachievable, or avoidable, in the way these objectors press.

Whilst further empirical and on-the-ground research is clearly required, I hope to have done enough to provide a presumptive case in favour of the centrality of activist-led education initiatives to the generation of ^(TE) class consciousness, and thus to the eventual achievement of a radically more just and egalitarian society.

Conclusion

I claimed in the introduction to this thesis that, confronted with the current scale of economic inequality, we want to know not only why contemporary capitalism might be undesirable, or how things might be better under some alternative scheme, but also *what ought to be done about this from where we are now*. What guidance or orientation can the lengthy arguments I have made here offer? Raising class consciousness is clearly no panacea, and more work remains to be done on the unjustly neglected set of transitional questions which I have been attempting to answer here. But I nonetheless hope to have shown both why raising class consciousness is a desirable and important component of a broader strategy of egalitarian political transition, and to have highlighted the kinds of activities that can effectively and permissibly contribute to delivering this valuable belief-desire complex. By way of conclusion, I want to briefly summarize both what I take to be the main *intellectual* and more *political* contributions of the project, as well as some questions that need to be pursued in future work.

7.1 Two contributions and two unresolved questions

My hope is that the preceding arguments make two central intellectual contributions. First, and most importantly, the thesis helps to begin to fill the substantial blind spot that - as my introduction made clear - so

many scholars are now identifying within contemporary egalitarian political thought. At the conceptual level, the thesis can also help to renovate and reintroduce neglected terms - the capitalist class, class struggle, class consciousness - which are now all-too rarely the subject of extended philosophical discussion, but which, I think, provide some of the keys to unlocking the question of transition. Whilst liberal egalitarianism (broadly construed) may well provide the most normatively persuasive account of what a just economic settlement looks like, I hope to have shown how ideas and notions from far outside of (and often even directly maligned by) this tradition remain vital if these utopian visions are ever to be realized. By making these contributions, my hope is that the thesis can help to re-orientate ongoing debates among egalitarians, which have thus far tended to focus overwhelmingly on ideal theory. The project hopefully does this by drawing attention *away* from the idealised dispute between property-owning democracy, social democracy, and liberal socialism and *towards* questions regarding transition.

Second, there is also a now-flourishing literature across the social sciences - both empirical and normative - on different activist practices. Among the more normative-focused discussions within this broad and emerging field, there has long been, as Burke Hendrix points out, an “odd gap in investigations” concerning the ethics of the fairly commonplace forms of political activity thought to lie between the two extremes of violent political revolution, on the one hand, and of nonviolent civil disobedience on the other (Hendrix 2019, 66). One of

the most exciting developments in the field over the last few years, in my view, has been that many political theorists have recently sought to lessen this gap considerably, subjecting many activist practices such as political partisanship (White and Ypi 2016), uncivil disobedience (Delmas 2018) and strikes (Gourevitch 2018) to extended normative scrutiny. But many of the activist practices discussed in this thesis - organising conversations, democratic municipalism, and activist-led education - currently remain highly underdiscussed.

Organising conversations, for instance, are often highlighted by the political activists engaged in building political parties and organising strikes as forming a key - if not *the* key - component in their tactical toolkits. For example, Jane McAlevey, among many others, contends that organising conversations will often be the *primary means* by which to make progress when doing trade union or community organising (McAlevey 2016, 89; Brooks, Singh and Winslow 2018, 69; Chambers 2018, 39). But the organising conversation is a political activity which has, thus far, evaded normative scrutiny almost entirely.¹³² One of my hopes is that the research presented here can also contribute to these discussions by expanding the range of activist practices which are thought to be worthy of extended normative evaluation.

In terms of the more empirically-focused work within this field

132 One partial exception is Zheng (2018) but even here, organising conversations are essentially just mentioned in passing, in the context of a broader discussion of individual responsibility for tackling structural injustice.

(e.g., Choudry 2015; Schulman 2021), my relatively abstract theoretical remarks on different activist practices clearly make no substantive empirical contribution of their own, and do not intend to. But, as Thomas Christiano notes, one thing that political philosophy can do is to “provide a map that gives us pointers as to what kinds of empirical research needs to be done” and this can often be an important contribution in its own right (Christiano 2008, 7). Whilst the remarks collected here thus cannot provide anything like certainty concerning the effectiveness and desirability of concrete instances of (for instance) activist education or democratic municipalism, I hope they can do enough to convince some empirically-minded scholars that looking at existing instances of (e.g.) activist-led education on the ground is an important future task, and also provide a sense of the elements of these practices that require particular empirical attention.

Despite these contributions, the arguments I develop here are clearly never going to be (and are not intended to be) the final word on the question of egalitarian political transition. If the broad thesis, or at least some components of it, are taken to be important contributions to an embryonic theory of transition, then one pressing task is obviously to begin to fill this out into a more exhaustive theory for a particular social and political context. For example, one question that seems to require particularly urgent study is the matter of the potential *linkages* and feedback between the different practices discussed here: in what ways, if at all, for instance, might activist-led education and democratic municipalist projects synergistically interlink?

But before we can turn to this, there are two other, perhaps more pressing unresolved questions, which I regret not having been able to deal with satisfactorily in my own work to date. Firstly, whilst I have done my best to avoid couching many of my claims in narrowly “orthodox Marxist” terms, one objection which remains open to the claims I defend here is that ultimately, I am calling for a return to a previous, now long discredited, way of doing politics and theorising transition. One aim of mine for future research is thus to conduct a more comprehensive historical survey and taxonomy of previous Marxist and socialist thinking on “the future of class politics” so that I can demonstrate more clearly to the sceptics where I defend or reformulate claims from this historical tradition and where I substantially depart from them.

Existing treatments of the question of transition from theorists have thus far mostly relied on a fairly narrow understanding of the scope of questions suitable for political philosophers, such as: what duties do individuals have to tackle injustice? How are these best discharged? And what limits ought they to observe in their attempts to tackle injustice to stay within the bounds of the morally permissible? Whilst important, this existing and fairly narrow focus tends to miss the further productive role that philosophers and theorists can play in what we could call *historical recovery*. By going back through the history of political thought and particularly by reconstructing the arguments about the achievement of radical economic social change made by thinkers in the past that might have been forgotten or overlooked, we

can arguably gain a more expansive and contextualised picture of transition. Clearly, this kind of effort is not completely absent in my work as it currently stands, as with my engagement with Lukács, or Tawney. But a more thorough discussion of the many other important historical figures who had important views on this question (and how their thoughts compare to the claims I defend here) seems to me to be a key priority of future research.

Secondly, there is also a small but growing philosophical literature on the promises and pitfalls of intersectionality (Bernstein 2020; Garry 2011; Kessel 2022; Lawford-Smith and Phelan 2022) which I regret not having engaged with more extensively in the construction of the argument I present here. Intersectional considerations have fast become a keyword of real-world political organising to the extent that no one now wants to be accused of being “anti-intersectional” in their political proposals. Whilst my hope is that most of the insights I develop above (in particular my discussion of class reductionism and how to avoid it) are compatible with a broadly intersectional framework, this compatibility is clearly currently mostly implicit within my analysis and is not something I develop comprehensively. Another direction for future research is thus to engage much more explicitly with this tradition of theorising.

The aim here would be, ideally, not just to guard my own arguments against a potential criticism from proponents of intersectional thinking, but also to *enrich intersectional thinking itself*. As Patricia Hill Collins and Rachel Yu Guo have recently noted, for

example, the literature on intersectionality is currently marked by an under-theorisation of class: “intersectional discourse has drawn more from theoretical and analytical treatments of race, gender, and sexuality than from class analysis. Despite the visibility of the term class and its apparent equal status to other categories within intersectionality, conceptions of class have been largely descriptive” (Collins and Yu Guo 2021, 239). Theorising more explicitly the place for intersectional concerns in the future of collective class agency and struggle would, in my view, be a useful way to help correct this blind spot.

7.2 Justice & Class Consciousness and real political struggle

Finally, in writing this thesis, I have been persistently struck by how indulgent it can seem to lock oneself away in libraries and lose oneself in works of philosophy at the same time as a series of crises engulf the political world. Whether what concerns one most is the surging popularity of a nativist, xenophobic brand of politics, continued inaction regarding the unfolding climate crisis, or a resurgence of military conflict and a heightened threat of nuclear war, it has sometimes been impossible, despite my best efforts, to view what I have been doing on a daily basis as standing in any kind of productive, useful relation with these phenomena and the forces and movements that seek to tackle them. To think that the appropriate reaction to what is going on out there in the real world is to research philosophical literatures on (for instance) social structures and epistemic agency, seemed to me, in my

more cynical moments, to fundamentally misunderstand the nature of the problems facing us: don't these issues call for *action*, rather than thought?

But of course, when my more cynical moments passed, I would come to see again how thought and action can - at least potentially - sit in productive alliance, rather than be dramatically opposed poles. Afterall, any kind of decision to act is reliant on theoretical underpinnings. As Michael Sandel has put it, theorizing is in many ways "unavoidable", because "our practices [...] are embodiments of theory." We thus "live some answer [to theoretical questions] all the time" (Sandel 1984, 81). It is not as if choosing to put down the books and to act rids oneself of a reliance on theory: ultimately, one could only do so if one felt that sufficient theoretical resources were already in existence to make continued theoretical exploration unnecessary.

I came of age politically during a time of - limited, but nonetheless real - advance for the organised political left. I witnessed the first upsurge in student and anti-austerity militancy in the UK from 2010 onwards when I was still at school. And I later came to experience the eventual institutionalisation and growth of much of this energy in the form of new Left media outlets - such as Novara Media – and, briefly, the capture of the UK Labour Party itself, when Jeremy Corbyn was propelled to the leadership by a diverse new party membership. Whilst this might have appeared to indicate that the time for thought had passed, and the time for action arrived, I soon came to see that the theories that underpinned discussions in left-activist circles, primarily

in the UK, but also in the United States and elsewhere,¹³³ were incomplete when it came to transitional matters in a way that mirrored the discussion in academic circles among egalitarian political philosophers.

Whilst we certainly could not accuse the organised left of being quite as silent on these questions of agency, strategy, and tactics as many political theorists, it nonetheless struck me that the question of “what is to be done?” was often treated during debates within these movements in a very buzzword-heavy, almost sloganeering manner. When the question of transition was raised in activist fora, the answer often amounted to little more than a claim that we ought to look away from the centres of electoral power and seek to “build power in communities”, that we ought to not simply mourn dispiriting events but focus instead on “organizing” (particularly on “deep organizing” over shallow “mobilization”) and even - sometimes - a reference to the importance of “consciousness-raising.” But the answers tended to lack anything like the same level of depth and sophistication with which left activists could typically debate and answer questions about the precise shape of a Green New Deal or even a Fully Automated Luxury Communism. This is also reflected in the ratio of books and articles published since the “left upsurge”: there are now many on these alternative political futures but nowhere near as many on the questions

¹³³ The rise of outlets like Jacobin Media and N+1, and the near capture of the Democratic Party by Bernie Sanders, mirrors in many ways the growth of the organised left in the UK.

of consciousness and strategy, which is usually just the subject of a few lines or at most a chapter at the end of work that is really concerned with other issues.¹³⁴

My hope is thus that the ideas defended in the thesis can provide a depth of thinking, and a useful evaluation of the kinds of assumptions that many left activists will often just take for granted (albeit often for perfectly understandable reasons of political expediency). More specifically, there are two ways in which I envision this work constituting a contribution to the real political struggle for a radically more equal world.

First, my hope is that this work can offer strategic guidance to some of the many political agents who are broadly sympathetic to the need for a more egalitarian economy but are currently highly unsure about what can and ought to be done about this right now. All citizens concerned about the inegalitarian drift of our societies are confronted with a limited number of hours each day in which to try to contribute to political change. The question of where these precious hours ought to be spent is a difficult and complex one. But if the arguments defended in this thesis are sound, then many of them ought to spend these hours seeking to raise class consciousness (and its preconditions) and do so through engaging in practices like activist-led education, organising conversations and democratic municipalism. My hope is that these

¹³⁴ Nancy Fraser has also recently argued that “the constant appeal to the term “coalition” in contemporary social movement circles [...] serves more as a *placeholder* for an organizational strategy than as an actual strategy” (Fraser and Jaeggi 2018, 219, emphasis added).

arguments are sufficiently persuasive to make this course of action seem more attractive than the various other tempting positions it is likely these broadly sympathetic citizens could come to hold. The hope is that the pull of what I take to be certain strategic pathologies can be lessened with the aid of the theoretical resources provided within this work. Among the most prevalent of such pathologies are: a hyper-pragmatism which refuses to countenance any form of action that does not maximize the chances of winning the next election, a view that left populist electioneering is sufficient by itself to achieve a just society rather than primarily a disruptive *means*, and a “left melancholia” which often results in forms of escapist political practice.

Second, my hope is that this work can also encourage and vindicate some of those already engaging in political education and other organising efforts similar to those described above. For example, some political activists in the United States responded to the election of Donald Trump in 2016 by leaving the large (relatively progressive and cosmopolitan) cities which they called home and relocating to the “rust belt”, to attempt to shift the views of Trump-supporting constituencies through on-the-ground organising (Jaffe 2017; 2018). My theoretical undertaking may serve to further motivate those already engaged in projects akin to those which the thesis describes and defends by contributing to the construction of what Michael Goodhart has called “a persuasive vocabulary” (Goodhart 2018, 190; cf. Ypi 2012, 62). The thesis might offer resources, in other words, to harden the resolve and increase the confidence of those already committed to these practices,

when they are faced with the practical or normative scepticism and all-out opposition they will no doubt find themselves coming up against, in debates with their fellow activists who may favour other approaches.

Class struggle organisations, after all, like most political organisations, are often the site of an internal “tug-of-war” between those actors who think the most appropriate deployment of their limited material and temporal resources is a highly mediatised and “professionalised” political strategy (engaging in focus grouping, television, mail and online advertising, and carefully managed media appearances, for instance, and trying to appeal to that section of society that is already most engaged with politics), and those, like the activists that have recently returned to the “rust belt”, who would rather direct these resources towards grassroots and often face-to-face political organising among the most marginalised (Green and Gerber 2015, 22).

Most sensible partisans, trade unionists and other activists fighting for a radically more just world recognize that *both* approaches are crucial facets of a successful campaign, and feel the pull of arguments from both camps. But the proponents of the more face-to-face, grassroots approach have traditionally struggled to win much in the way of notable gains out of this internal struggle over resources. They often lack the kind of rhetorical resources which might convincingly counter the many arguments in favour of a more mediatised approach, such as the incredibly labour-intensive nature of face-to-face organising (Lopez 2004, 95). In my experience, senior members of activist organisations often even consider a more

grassroots approach to be a kind of *indulgence*, perhaps making its practitioners feel good, but ultimately paling into insignificance when compared to more “realistic” methods of achieving political change. These individuals are prone to the view that we ought to just accept as fixed points the constraints of the current sentiments and preferences of the electorate (as distinct from the citizenry as a whole), and work within this framework. My hope is that by highlighting in a particularly precise way *what* class consciousness is, *why* raising it can be feasibility-enhancing, and the kinds of *practices* required to do so in a transitionally valuable way, this thesis can help provide proponents of a more face-to-face approach with the kind of strengthened vocabulary that will enable them to more successfully make their case in the face of such objections moving forward.

Having said this, my view is certainly not that left-activist movements need to be handed *all* of their ideas from on high by political philosophers. Activists themselves, as Sally Haslanger reminds us, “critically engage dominant paradigms [...] offer alternative explanations, and [...] construct new tools of thought and action. *Philosophical work isn’t only happening in classrooms and academic offices*” (Haslanger forthcoming). Left movements can and do engage in their own theorising, and academic theorising about egalitarian transitions thus needs to be done at least partly in conjunction with this work. But recognizing this point also does not, I think, disqualify entirely those who occupy somewhat different, more ivory tower standpoints, from offering insights of their own. I thus ultimately

conceive of the project as a contribution to an ongoing debate, that needs to happen both in and outside the academy, rather than anything like the final word.

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