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CRISIS OF REPRESENTATION
AS AUTOfHRITARIAN.
THE RULING CLASS
IN ADORNO AND ROSANVALLON

BY
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According to theory, history is the history of class struggles. But the concept of class is bound up with the emergence of the proletariat. Even when it was still revolutionary, the bourgeoisie called itself the third estate. By extending the concept of class to prehistory, theory denounces not just the bourgeois, whose freedom, together with their possessions and education, perpetuates the tradition of the old injustice.

Democracy is manifesting its vitality as a regime even as it withers as a social form. The sovereign citizenry has steadily increased its ability to intervene in government and magnified its presence. […] The very vigor of their criticism of the representative system demonstrates their determination to keep the democratic ideal alive. This is a characteristic of our times. The aspiration to expand freedom and establish powers responsive to the general will has toppled despots everywhere and changed the face of the globe.

It appears on the offset of the crisis of democracy that the essence of its breathing as an organism resides in the productivity of the ruling class as elected governors of the governed to produce an appearance of equality, justice and direct delegation of representation. It is then, as Adorno and

Rosanvallon suggest, that the crisis of democracy resides in the failing reconfiguration of the ruling elites and their ability to fulfil their role as representatives of ‘the people’ as such. And as a consequence, the crisis of democracy appears as the loss of faith, trust and conviction in the rulers by the ruled. However, what is the nature of this distrust and lack of faith? Is it merely a political shift stirred by an economic crisis as its basis? Or can the rhetoric and discourse of the rulers be transformed to restore democracy to its former basis, and to turn away from authoritarian possibilities? This failure of representation manifests itself not in the lack or disparity suffered by the ruling class itself, but by the appeal from the people who no longer trust in, possess faith of, or believe for the continued democratic practice. But a definition is needed of the former democratic practices that kept the organism of democracy living before this supposed ‘crisis’ in order to demonstrate a solution or way out of authoritarian practices, that is, if we are to defend the notion of democracy and its ideals of justice, equality and freedom, no matter how vague or elusive. Thus, as a consequence as Adorno and Rosanvallon also correctly state that whilst this democratic dream may be coming to an end, the last apparent death throes of its defence are also being made apparent.

It appears then, democracy is somewhat dialectically bound in its health and in its crisis, only in the shadow of its lingering death, to we truly grasp in the light of what we wish to defend and continue. But, if former democratic practices no longer work in the contemporary context, the proposal of new democratic practices must be differentiated to the former to reproduce a new democracy, and one, namely, that is ‘not’ in crisis as such. However, it shall be seen that perhaps one weakness of Rosanvallon’s and Adorno’s diagnosis of contemporary democracy, is that on the face of it, it appears contradictory, but perhaps in these last attempts to bolster the shores of democracy
against a tide of authoritarianism, it is in fact these very same attempts that push democracy away from itself and into its brother, totalitarianism. The second part of Adorno’s and Rosanvallon’s analysis lends itself to a very much debated question in academia, media and abroad, on the incompatibility and compatibility of industrial capitalism with democracy itself. The work of Martin Wolf as an economist points towards their incompatibility unless we are to globalise more, and extend the global market outwards away from national sovereignty, domestic markets and closed borders.

Therefore, whilst the dream of democracy is absolutely an idea worth fighting for, the struggle towards, for and against it appear dangerously linked in a way that democratic practice as it is normally conceived gradually results in its supposedly moral enemy, authoritarianism. In this paper, I wish to firstly take a compressed account of Adorno’s and Rosanvallon’s conception of the ruling class and its role in democracy, and draw parallels to the relevance of their philosophies to the public issues facing today, being the failing of democracy and our need to simultaneously defend it, but to defend it by other means outside the current failing democratic practice-paradigm, and perhaps lending itself to authoritarian measures to preserve the democratic dream. However, it is my argument in order to accomplish this task, we need to take lessons from both Adorno and Rosanvallon in understanding that whilst democracy in its decay will reveal its’ authoritarian heart, we must fight in a differentiated way to preserve the ideals of justice, equality and freedom as fundamental notions worth preserving regardless of political ideology. Therefore, if any this paper shall serve as a theoretical footstep towards conceptualizing the crisis of democracy through the failings of representation of and on behalf of the changing ruling classes and the governed through the work of Adorno and Rosanvallon. It is apparent that this
paradox of democratic practice to defend democracy is one that both Adorno and Rosanvallon examine in detail. This paper for its purpose therefore, wishes to examine the notion of the ruling class in Adorno and Rosanvallon conceptually. Such that, it has no interest nor reason to examine the historical context of both writers nor the reception of their thought in general, the purpose of this paper is to probe philosophically the meaning and interpretation of both their accounts solely. By probing this specific question of the ruling class this paper hopes to diagnose the contemporary malaise, which has produced populism and its derision of the new ruling elites and experts in order to examine Adorno and Rosanvallon in turn and point to a precisely new historical moment of democratic capitalism. The parallels between Adorno and Rosanvallon are present however they differentiate not only on their diagnoses of this shift in the capitalist mode of governance but also in their solutions.

It is distinctly democratic to conceive of a future promise to come of a new moment of recognition, whilst ignoring class divisions themselves, the very disparate elements of the body politic are bound together and simultaneously clothed over with the garment of democratic equality and justice. However, to what extent can democracy *adropos* survive in a period of crisis in which the dream of democracy has been realised both by the governed classes and the governing, ruling class not as a cliché failure, nor as a success, but simply as a game no longer worth playing? It appears both in the work of Adorno and Rosanvallon that its democracy’s decadence is rife both in the minds of the ruling class and their governed people, so whence do we go from this realisation?

It seems that both in the work of Adorno and Rosanvallon that an emphasis on the ruling class and their existence proves vital either in the destruction or prolonging of the democratic
idealisation of political life. However each philosopher deals with the problem of the ruling class in differing manners, perhaps amounting to Adorno’s pessimism on one side, and Rosanvallon’s optimism on the other, the ruling class is failing the dream of democracy itself regardless. And perhaps the direct election of the president is a possible remedy to this problem as Rosanvallon suggests, or some form of wider socio-economic reconfiguration of the political economy is needed to adjust the ruling classes as Adorno advocates. Or perhaps a combination of both their diagnoses as a solution?

This essay shall attempt to take account of both of their works specifically emphasising the place of the ruling class and deciphering the role it plays in their analysis of democracy and its potentiality to reconcile the current catastrophe of representation and the coming tide of authoritarianism beneath the veil of democracy. The decisive differences in both their conceptions of the ruling class, is that Adorno constructs an hisotricized account of the transition from market to monopoly capitalism, such that the former ruling class has been displaced and as a consequence the disparate formation of many different plateaus of ruling classes then produces a necessary diaspora of power and representation amongst the ruling classes themselves which then leads to a realization of the crisis of representation amongst the governed peoples as a dialectical result.

On the other hand, the ruling class for Rosanvallon is not as clear and concise as Adorno’s view, Rosanvallon on the other hand focuses on the former American and French revolutions and their ideas of democratic citizenship as a means by which to traverse the differing classes, this

genealogical aspect to Rosanvallon’s account points to a major weakness in Adorno however. By taking account of Adorno and Rosanvallon and their analyses of the ruling class, this essay shall
firstly suggest that the crisis of representation democracy faces in fact does not represent a failure of democratic practice, which can then be fixed as such, but this mechanism of the failure of delegation is democratic practice proper. Thus, it shall be argued that the crisis of representation in democracy logically leads to more authoritarian praxis within democratic spheres of delegation, not as a transformative process but merely as an unveiling of the truer, inner essence of democracy itself. Thus, authoritarian politics are not a completely different phenomenon from the democratic condition, but a handmaiden or sister of democracy in its inverted form, perhaps best expressed by the analogy of a hydra in which democracy manifests itself as, and then authoritarian merely becomes a singular version in which the heads become one. Democracy is a *katechontic* dream, however the nightmares of authoritarianism are under the bed of the handmaiden of delegation, in which in the continuing impotence of representation breeds a blind faith to a moment of decisionism to a given sovereign, but we must divert away from former modes of democratic practice which no longer work as they did in the moment of ‘non-crisis’.

Firstly, Adorno’s account of the ruling class in capitalist democracy attempts to at once clarify Marx’s account of class and the new need to account for a new theory of class, without which, Adorno sees any critique of culture or democracy itself is meaningless. This aspect is perhaps Rosanvallon’s flaw in not emphasising the profound effect the change in the ruling class and their representation has in the crisis of democracy. Adorno argues in his essay *Reflections on Class Theory* (1942) that in the transition from free-market capitalism to monopoly capitalism a blurring or blanket or invisibility has been made over the class system itself, in the sense that in the wake of the Frankfurt School they tried to understand why the German worker was not aware of his own exploitation. Thus, for Adorno the failing of
democracy is directly linked to the transformation of the ruling class into many different subsets as opposed to a former unified order, and that the reconfiguration is directly linked to the failures of delegation and representation as a result. In this sense, for Adorno either the modes of representation have to radically be changed because the modes and structures of the governing and governed have been changed, or a radical change to the political economy must be considered to account for the increasing tensions and contradictions between the ruling classes themselves.

The latest phase of class society is dominated by monopolies; it tends toward fascism, [...]. While it vindicates the doctrine of class struggle with its concentration and centralization, extreme power and extreme impotence directly confronting one another in total contradiction, it makes people forget the actual existence of hostile classes. [...] The diabolical image of harmony, the invisibility of the classes caused by the petrified mold in which they are held fast, can only gain such power over people’s minds because the idea that the oppressed, the workers of the world, might unite as a class and put an end to the horror seems doomed in the light of the present distribution of power and impotence.³

Therefore, it seems that according to Adorno any attempt to take account of the failings of democracy must be historicized in order to understand the contemporary transitions to a more authoritarian vocation. The contradiction which both Adorno and Rosanvallon identified as addressed in the opening quotes is that any call for more extreme democratic practice to save democracy perhaps leads to its logical consequence, being more

³ Adorno, Thedor. Reflections on Class Theory, cit., p. 96.
authoritarian politics. Additionally, as a note to Adorno’s comment regarding fascism, as a broad comment it can be seen that the rhetoric of the fascists most explicit in the Italian fascist regime, was that their system of removing the bureaucracy, parliament and other modes of delegation and representation was in fact, the ‘true democracy’, uniting the people directly with the State and the Duce. Thus Adorno’s analysis above analyzes the shift from market capitalism to monopoly capitalism as a feature of fascism in two senses, firstly as a disruption of the delegation of the ruling classes and the ‘forgetting’ of the existence of classes themselves as more authoritarian practice of supposedly ‘democratic’ politics attempts to save democracy but in fact replaces it with more centralized, non-representative, nondelegation politics. To note here in reference to Rosanvallon and democratic praxis, it seems that any attempt to reconcile a democratic dream through a reconfiguration of the ruling class and their activities and consciousness to better the demos must be mediated through a concrete, material emphasis of the historical conditions of the body politic and their respective classes. To put it simply, the ruling class are the owners of the means of production, and so their relation to the exploited must be taken into account in any attempt to democratize a state of affairs if democracy does not remain a paradox. Thus Adorno declares: “The omnipotence of repression and its invisibility are the same thing”. Therefore, because the transition to monopoly capitalism has rid the consciousness of the exploited classes such that ideology masks the ever present reality of wage slavery and the class system, a new theory of class and how that relates to the ruling class in democratic capitalism is thus required. Therefore, in order to understand how the ruling class must better represent

4 Ibid., p. 97.
and become delegates for the governed classes means a total reevaluation of this change in the political economy, the ruling class must recognise the suffering of the most vulnerable in order to restore faith in the people. The shift from market to monopoly capitalism not only estranged the ruling classes from one another, but the previous ruling class in the times of a strengthening of democracy had far more democratic legitimacy, proximity and representation of the governed classes, but the shift has estranged them from democratic practice. Even in Marx, there is not an explicit analysis of class albeit that class is one of the central components of historical materialism itself. However, Adorno makes clear that any critique of the democratic failures of liberal society is inexplicably linked to the concept of class and beyond: “The critique of liberal society cannot stop short at the concept of class, which is both as true and as false as the liberal system itself”\(^5\). What is crucial for Adorno in his understanding of the role of the ruling class in the immanent authoritarianism of his time, is not only the transition from free-market capitalism to a monopoly version, but also how the “ruling class disappears behind the concentration of capital”\(^6\). Here, there is something to note in the historicization of the ruling class and its historical moment of capital, perhaps the crisis of representation is furthermore linked to this concentration which not only deprives the toiling classes, but deprives the ruling class of any further need to innovate and stimulate any form of culture to represent other class interests, and more importantly act as elected delegates by the governed classes. Additionally, a parallel here behind the claim of Adorno’s ‘concentration of capital’ and the ‘inequality’ Rosanvallon argues against is the predominant reason

\(^5\) Ibid., pp. 98-99.  
\(^6\) Ibid., p. 99.
for the crisis in the ruling classes, and as a result, the consequence being a loss of faith by the people in democratic institutions and practice, and therefore a gradual demand towards non-democratic measures are needed in response to this seemingly unending circle. Thus, for Adorno the change in the fundamental structure of the form of capitalism thus dialectically produces a crisis of representation which tends towards more authoritarian modes of life. “This development has put an end to the episode of liberalism; the dynamics of yesterday are unmasked as the ossified prehistory of today, namely, the anonymous class as the dictatorship of the self-appointed elite”\(^7\). However, this does not mean that the ruling class is not completely autonomous from the system of democracy or capitalism, “the ruling class is not just governed by the system; it rules through the system and ultimately dominates it”\(^8\). In the \textit{Editor’s Afterword} to the \textit{Dialectic Of Enlightenment} the question of class is raised: “The planned economy has become inevitable; the only decisive political question is whether it will be democratic or totalitarian, that is, the question as to how access to the administrative control of the economy and thus to the new ruling class is regulated”\(^9\). Therefore, it seems inevitable that the state regulated capitalism therefore produces a new stage in which the previous modes of democratic delegation and representation are therefore put into crisis because the fundamental ground of their previous form of praxis has shifted which creates a contradiction between the new ruling class who are now enfranchised, and the former ruling class is cut out failing to represent itself, yet alone other classes.

\(^7\) Ibid., p. 100.
\(^8\) Ibid., p. 104.
The second aspect of Adorno’s analysis of the ruling class takes place mostly in the latter half of his philosophical and cultural analysis, the culture industry. If monopolistic capitalism has produced a new ruling class that ostracizes the former ones, then the forms of domination such as wage slavery must also be transformed, and so, the culture industry is born in line with the monopolistic version of capitalism to keep the other classes subdued in entertainment where play mimics work itself.

Formerly, it attacked the cultural privilege of the ruling class. But today, when that power of the banal extends over the entire society, its function has changed. This change of function affects all music, not only light music, in whose realm it could comfortably enough be made innocuous. The diverse spheres of music must be thought of together. Their static separation, which certain caretakers of culture have ardently sought – the totalitarian radio was assigned to the task, on the one hand, of providing good entertainment and diversion, and on the other, of fostering the so-called cultural goods, as if there could still be good entertainment and as if the cultural goods were not, by their administration, transformed into evils – the neat parcelling out of music’s social field of force is illusionary.

Thus, the fundamental shift to monopolistic capitalism gives birth to the operations of the culture industry which attempts to capture the masses in new forms of domination within entertainment itself. To use Adorno’s analysis of the beginnings of mass entertainment today, one would need to convert its hypothesis into the realm of new media that politics is mediated on, such that contemporary forms of media such as the internet and politics television shows are primary modes of entertainment.

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which simultaneously allow free play and leisure but whilst infecting the consumers with more aspect of the work world. Rosanvallon also in his corpus notes the fundamental changes in politics new media has created in both representation, delegation and this loss of faith in the ruling class. Fundamentally, in the next section in our analysis of Rosanvallon we shall examine whether his new theories concerning the ruling class in a new vision for a new democracy to come can despite the form of monopolistic capitalism that Adorno diagnoses as antithetical to these promises of democracy, in fact prevail. Secondly, Rosanvallon’s account of the ruling class in democracy albeit on the face of it appears not to be a dialectical account similar to Adorno’s diagnosis, however this is not the case. Rosanvallon in *The Society of Equals* claims that paradoxically that in the crisis of representation, the dream of democracy and its various delegations are in fact becoming more and more emboldened, such that milder forms of democratic practice such as the ballot box are increasingly becoming overrun by more direct forms of representation. The sole cause of this supposed democratization in our time is inequality\footnote{Rosanvallon Pierre, *The Society of Equals*, cit., p. 2} Rosanvallon claims, and so alike to Adorno the fundamental changes in differentiation of the classes must be healed over with new antidotes of democratic praxis. But to what extent can increasing democratic praxis in effect, heal or sublimate the gross problem of global inequality in today’s globalised world? Rosanvallon’s solution to these problems are distinctly different to Adorno who envisages a radical change in the political economy as a means by which to remedy the crisis of representation as a result of monopolistic capitalism. Rosanvallon claims that because “[g]lobal equality is becoming mixed up with social inequality. That is why the renationalization of democracy
(through greater social cohesion and reappropriation of the political by citizens) is one way of combating both simultaneously”\[^{12}\]. On the face of it, it seems that in the time of the current crisis of representation and the fracturing of the democratic body turning its head towards more authoritarian means to end bureaucracy, liberalism and the breathing of the democratic machine, a more internationalist approach would in Rosanvallón’s opinion heal the divide between classes and the divide between democratic nations in a globalized world. But when the turn to more authoritarian politics also adopts this method of reverting from a globalized world to a national, state boundary, to what extent can Rosanvallón claim this model for increasing democratic practice? Precisely because the presence of more authoritarian regimes claim the same method as an antidote to liberal, capitalist democracy? His recourse to the French and American revolutionaries conception of equality to remedy the increasing democratization and simultaneous inequalization proposes a counter-point to how equality is usually conceived in contemporary discourses in philosophy and political philosophy alike. But perhaps this movement of Rosanvallón would fall prey to Adorno’s critique of the antiquarian nature of bourgeois thought in that by proposing a past where classes were equal and people were all citizens, it is promising a dogmatic patriarchal past in which the classes were just as hostile except with an ‘optimistic liberalism’. However, these preliminary discussions are only

Rosanvallón’s hypotheses of the current, broader phenomena surrounding the crisis of representation in current democracies, so we need to further examine how he conceives of the role of the ruling class in rectifying the current crisis of democracy. The

\[^{12}\text{Ibid., A Preliminary Outline, p. 301.}\]
ruling class is initially defined by Rosanvallon as the ones who by
the “anointment by the people”\textsuperscript{13} are appointed as the ones to
govern. The fundamental difference between Adorno and
Rosanvallon concerns the separation and conflation in each case
in relation to democracy with capitalism. Although the event of
“true democratic universalism”\textsuperscript{14} is not possible anymore
according to Rosanvallon, within the changed ruling class that he
consistently refers to in reference to the ruling classes of both
revolutionary France and America which has inevitably changed
and become more complex in nature in contemporary Western
democracies. He refers to his work as a history of the political
insomuch as it refers to previous historical examples of
democracy, citizenship and equality as a means by which to
challenge contemporary discourses which disrupt the original
novelty and power of these terms themselves. In Samuel Moyn’s
and Andrew Jainchill’s article on French Democracy between
Totalitarianism and Solidarity: Pierre Rosanvallon and Revisionist
Historiography (2004) it seems that François Furet, Rosanvallon’s
teacher concludes that the French Revolution and its democratic
foundations in fact laid the foundations for the later forms of
totalitarianism. Although critiques of totalitarianism from Arendt
and Lefort are present in Rosanvallon, it appears that the lesson
from Furet seems to have been neglected insomuch as
Rosanvallon clings to his conception of autogestion and negative


democracy, or in other words the production of solidarity\textsuperscript{15} by more closely linked associations of democratic unions. It is worth here to quote the article at length in order to demonstrate this gap in Rosanvallon’s conception of a new democracy that fails to take account of the transformation of the contemporary ruling classes as opposed to analysing the downfall and existences of previous ruling classes in revolutionary America and France for example.

\[\ldots\] Furet famously and provocatively ascribed the causes of the Terror to the ideology of democracy. In his analysis, the voluntaristic appeal to popular sovereignty, rooted in Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s \textit{Social Contract} and passed from actor to revolutionary actor as the sole coin of legitimacy, inexorably led to the furies of the Terror. After pointing to “the one notion that made Robespierre’s language the prophecy of a new era: that democratic politics had come to decide the fate of individuals and peoples,” in the next breath Furet charged “democratic politics” with the innate propensity of violently “break[ing] its enemies’ resistance.” Establishing the “new god of a fictitious community,” the Revolution reached a compelled finale in the Terror, since Maximilien Robespierre’s “metaphysics was . . . not a parenthesis . . . but a type of public authority that the revolutionary phenomenon alone made possible and logical.

Furthermore, Furet argued, the French Revolution planted the seeds of twentieth-century totalitarianism\textsuperscript{16}.

Thus, Rosanvallon’s theories of democratic practice albeit apparently springing from a critique of totalitarianism, fails to acknowledge as his teacher Furet did, that precisely this mechanism of democracy produces an all more powerful form of

\textsuperscript{15} Kurtz Geoffrey, \textit{The Production of Solidarity: Pierre Rosanvallon on Civil Society and Democracy}, CUNY, New Political Science, Routledge, (Online, 2008).

totalitarianism. Although Rosanvallon claims to be making a philosophical history of the present, it seems that the present is only mediated by his constant reference to the French and American revolution. Irrespective of the ruling class, Rosanvallon does not distinctly theorize about them as such, but negatively shows their existence in his discussion of increasing popular sovereignty and the will of the political community. Although he attempts to frame the politics of democracy in historical terms as a means by which to form a critique of totalitarianism, in its neglect of an analysis of the ruling class it appears dubious whether Rosanvallon can effectively theorize a new democratic future, and one wonders whether this democratic future of self-management itself too closely resembles communistic politics and totalitarian authoritarianism at the same juncture. The call for greater transparency for the elected representatives is not a call for democraticization, it is a call for greater clarity, conciseness and vision for authoritarian practice. However, it seems decisive both for Adorno and Rosanvallon, that in order to solve the crisis of democracy we need to take account of the changing economic trends and shifts taking place as the deeper, sedimentations that shift beneath the faithlessness of democratic citizens, both also simultaneously understanding how to better form practices of representation precisely when the economic grounds beneath our feet is changed in such a way that does not allow for former practices of representation. Thus, Rosanvallon concludes on his theory of self-management in his earlier life alongside transnational democracy and solidarity as a means to this end, whereas Adorno practically and concretely offers prolific dialectical mediation, but resounds in silence in the realm of ‘everyday life’ which he, naturally would call ‘reified thought’ and would be non-existent as a product of contemporary capitalist ideology. So as Rosanvallon concludes perhaps the dream of democracy will never be realized and that is the mode of
existence, in dreaming of a moment when the ‘self-management of everyday life’ is thought and never actualized, however this dream seems utopian if not accompanied by an economic change.

People were very far from restricting their thinking to the topic of how to manage firms....[Autogestion] became the mot de passe of the 1970s . . . and involved the emergence of a new conception of democracy. On three principal levels. First, it implied the refusal and contestation of all centralized and hierarchical systems and in this sense suggested the generalized extension of democratic procedures to the governance of all of the different spheres of social life. It also motivated the search for a way of transcending the procedural limits of traditional representative democracy. Finally, it corresponded to a new perception of the relation between public and private life, “self management” looking as if it were the corollary, at once legitimate and necessary, of more specifically institutional reforms.... People began speaking, in a general manner, of the self-management of everyday life [autogestion du quotidien]^{17}.