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Four faces of political legitimacy: An analytical framework

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Chapter 4
Politics as Conflict: Support and Dramaturgy

Politics is not only about domination, but also about conflict. As an object of analysis we already defined politics, in most general terms, as being intrinsically conflictive (see chapter 1). We also claimed that the autonomy of politics as a value sphere rests upon the necessity to make sovereign decisions for collective action under conditions of conflict and uncertainty. To this extent, the nature of politics as conflict and as domination – sovereignty – are not inherently in opposition. Indeed, in our discussion of the classic liberal normative theorists these concepts are intrinsically related. Especially in the natural law tradition of Rousseau and Hobbes, the legitimate sovereign is a solution to the 'war of every man against every man' in the state of nature (Hobbes 1985 [1651]:184). At the same time, we have also seen that this creates what we have called 'the problem of order'. Legitimate domination as a solution for the conflictive *nature of man*, might therefore be interpreted as a shift from horizontal social conflict to vertical political conflict, i.e. to a conflict between 'state' and 'society', which preoccupied Locke among others.

When politics as domination and as conflict are not necessarily exclusive, it can nevertheless be argued that emphasising the conflictive nature of *legitimate politics* might yield a different understanding of political legitimacy. In the contemporary normative debate this seems to be exactly the claim of scholars like Mouffe (1989, 1999, 2005a, 2005b). Mouffe tries to criticise the liberal tradition that might not deny the conflictive nature of politics as such, but does deny the legitimacy of conflict.[1] Liberalism invalidates conflict and faction in favour of consensus and the common good. Outside this normative debate, however, there does not seem to be one general or dominant empirical theory that tries to understand political legitimacy on the basis of the conflictive nature of legitimate politics. The empirical debate is very diverse and fragmented. Nevertheless, we might perceive the general contours of a tradition that we label as *democratic realism* – a tradition that includes pluralism, neo-pluralism, neo-Marxism, cybernetic system theory, as well as welfare-economics and the contemporary debates concerning 'output-legitimacy'. In this chapter I will analyse this tradition with the main goal of understanding what political legitimacy means if we start from the presumption that the nature of legitimate politics is conflict.

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[1] This justified critique on the liberal normative project seems to explain the contemporary interest in the works of Carl Schmitt, but, in my opinion, hardly the importance of these works themselves.

4.1 Democratic Realism: Dealing with Weber's legacy

We can understand democratic realism as a theoretical tradition that tries to deal with the problematic legacy of Weber where it concerns modern democracy. This legacy, I argue, contains: 1) the inevitability of conflict in modern society; 2) the problem of rational politics; and 3) the problem of democratic stability.

First, if we have claimed in the previous chapter that legal domination is based upon expectations of *instrumental* rationality, this does not deny the fact that Weber also perceives different social 'value spheres', which all have their own specific *logics* and *values*. To this extent, the primacy of instrumental rationality does not mean that there is only one type of reason. Weber at least discerns the value spheres of science, religion, law (or 'jurisprudence'), aesthetics, art, religion and, indeed, of politics (2004a:9-10, 18-9, 29). For Weber, the *internal* demands, rules and methods of each social sphere are *instrumental* to their specific value – their specific 'god' – while at the same time these ultimate values are disenchanted, i.e. have lost their magic or inherent validity (2004a:23). While this might generate problems of validity, we have seen in the former chapter that processes of 'self-discipline and self-denial' can explain the subjective validity of instrumental rules for 'their own sake' (2004b:54; 2004a:12). A different problem, however, is that there is no longer a single value or truth that transcends these different value spheres, these different logics and different gods. Modernity, according to Weber, is not only disenchanted, it is also inherently conflictive – "the conflict between these gods is never-ending" (2004a:27).

Second, modernity understood as "this conflict between the gods" has direct implications for the political value sphere. When politics makes binding decision or 'value judgments' for the collective, it is inherently confronted with this 'insoluble struggle' between 'different value-systems' (2004a:22-3). For Weber, this means, on the one hand, that politics is itself conflictive, i.e. politics is "to strive for a share of power or to influence the distribution of power" (2004b:33). According to Weber this is especially the case for modern 'mass-democracy' with its characteristic political 'party machines' 'pursuing interests' and 'fighting' for votes, funds and power (1978:284-5,1396; 2004b:54,58,62).[2] On the other hand, this means that the rationality of the political value sphere itself seems threatened. Although it is not true, as Habermas states, that Weber's vision of positivist

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[2] Weber explicitly contrasts mass-democracy or 'plebiscitary democracy' with genuine *herrschaftsfremde* democracy which concerns the levelling of relations of domination, while the 'decisive aspect' of modern democracy is "the *levelling of the governed* in face of the governing" (1978:266-7,985; 2004b:62). Mass democracy, for Weber, 'inevitably' entails bureaucracy (1978:983), while genuine democracy is opposed to the 'rule' of bureaucracy (991). Besides, the 'free mandate' of representation (293) is for Weber a form of domination as the representative is no longer the 'servant' but the 'chosen master' (1128). Representation does not mean democracy but rather 'aristocracy' (1978:296, see also Manin 1997). Finally, the inevitability of the party machine in modern democracy explains, for Weber, a further kind of disenchantment: the "spiritual proletarianization" of its followers – the 'loss of their souls' (2004b:74).

law must "feed on legitimate lawmaking" we could argue that the 'rationality' of legality is threatened when politics itself is an irrational process of decision-making (Habermas 1996:169). For Weber, the two 'mortal sins' of politics are "the lack of commitment to a cause and the lack of a sense of responsibility" (2004b:78). Weber fears the 'emotional exploitation' by the 'demagogue' who 'woos the masses' and strives for 'power for its own sake' reducing politics to meaningless theatre (2004b:61,67,78).[3] Politics, then, needs a 'purpose' – a 'cause' which, to this extent, reduces politics to an *instrument*, a means.[4] When politics is meaningless without commitment, Weber also fears a 'pure ethics of conviction' in which actors "take no responsibility for the *consequences* of their actions" and remain "ignorant of the satanic powers that are at work" in the real world (2004b:91). Without an ethic of conviction and without an ethic of responsibility politics, for Weber, becomes meaningless or irrational. To solve this problem of political rationality Weber puts his hope upon "the 'strength' of a political 'personality'" to combine the two 'antitheses' (2004b:78). A rational political leader is a leader "who acts in harmony with an ethics of responsibility", but who upon reaching a certain point will say: "Here I stand, I can do no other" (2004b:92).[5]

Finally, mass-democracy, according to Weber, inherently "means the division of all enfranchised citizens into politically active and politically passive segments" (2004b:54). The passive supporters, moreover, are hoping to obtain 'rewards' from politics (2004b:62). This instrumentalisation of politics problematises the stability of democracy. As already discussed, Weber argues that a political order might be internally guaranteed by strategic actions, but that such guarantee is based upon *cognitive* and *conditional* interests. Weber argues therefore that the stability of a political order must 'in addition' be guaranteed by *normative* and *unconditional beliefs* (1978:213). Although Weber is able to explain such beliefs in relation to politics as domination, he fails to explain them directly in relation to politics as conflict.[6]

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[3] Interestingly, Weber seems to argue that striving for power for power's sake makes politics a 'meaningless activity' (2004b:78) whereas "science for its own sake" is precisely what explains science as a vocation (2004a:12).

[4] Weber seems to hint that this purpose might also concern 'canonised reasons of state' especially understood as a general cultured belief in *progress* (1978:979). However, the meaning of progress is inherently paradoxical since the life of the individual is "placed into an infinite 'progress'" which means that "true meaning is always one step ahead" (1958b:139-40).

[5] In addition it seems that Weber thought that a *critical science* could force politicians towards "clarity and a sense of responsibility" (2004b:27).

[6] As such, Habermas is only partly right when he claims that because Weber emphasises "the rationally irresoluble pluralism of competing value systems and beliefs" he cannot provide a justification for the "rational value-oriented foundations of the belief in legitimacy" (1975:100). Weber can explain it, but not upon conflict itself. In case of democracy, indeed, Weber not only mentions the hopes for instrumental 'rewards' but also the intrinsic rewards of 'personal devotion' to a charismatic leader (2004b:62).

The tradition of democratic realism, tries to deal – implicitly or explicitly – with this legacy of Weber. What foremost binds this tradition together, however, is that it tries to find solutions for the problems of democracy – the problems of conflict, rationality and stability – by a general *economisation of political theory*. Indeed, the market and economic theory seem to promise answers of how interest conflicts can still yield a rational and stable social system. Democratic realism, to this extent, is a continuation of the classic liberal tradition we found in Madison, Smith, Hume, Bentham and Mill. We might say that the democratic realists construct a general economic model of democratic politics along the following idealised lines: (1) politics concerns the allocation of value, i.e. politics, in Lasswell's famous definition, concerns 'who gets what, when, and how' (1958 [1936]); (2) this implies democratic politics is about interest conflicts and struggles for power; (3) the dynamics of political interest competition is organised by the institutional structure of representative democracy; (4) this institutional structure at least consists of a political labour differentiation between the political active and political passive; and (5) rational political output results as an unintended consequence from this political process – as a function of democratic competition and strategic-interest maximisation. The concepts of value allocation, interest competition, labour differentiation, unintended consequences and output-rationality readily testify the economic nature of this tradition.

If this is the general political model of democratic realism, we might in addition discern three analytical approaches within this tradition, each based upon a different notion of political conflict (see table 4.1). For sure, these approaches are often combined within a single theory, but they do allow us to organise the presentation of the broad tradition of democratic realism. This means, we can first discuss theories that perceive political conflict as interest competition in the direct analogy to the market. The main question of this approach concerns the rationality of the democratic process, while legitimacy is equalled with output-efficiency. Second, we can discern pluralist theories that understand political conflict foremost in terms of horizontal social conflict, i.e. in terms of social cleavages. The main concern is the stability and viability of democratic politics, while democratic legitimacy is understood in relation to output-effectiveness. The final analytical approach foremost centres on cybernetic system theory, in which political conflict is understood in terms of a vertical political conflict between 'state' and 'society'. The primary question is the stability of the political system, while political output-effectiveness is thought to explain political support.

In what follows, I will examine these three analytical approaches of democratic realism and evaluate these understandings of political legitimacy. I conclude that this tradition fails to come up with a credible notion of political legitimacy (in terms of the analytical framework of this thesis), but that it does provide us the analytical tools to understand political legitimacy in terms of dramaturgy.

	The Market Analogy	Pluralism	Cybernetics
Type of Conflict	Interest Competition	Horizontal Conflict	Vertical Conflict
Main Concern	Rationality	Democratic Stability	Democratic Stability
Political Legitimacy	Output efficiency equals legitimacy	Output effectiveness allows legitimacy	Output effectiveness explains support

Table 4.1 – The three analytical approaches of democratic realism

4.2 The Market Analogy: Conflict as Interest Competition

The main thrust of the democratic realist tradition, incorporating many different schools of thought, is the explicit or implicit analogy between the economic and the political system. The market analogy seems promising where it concerns the relation between strategic interests and the public good and the relation between interest competition and market stability. Economic theory, then, seems to hold the answers that are so problematic for democratic theory: rationality, stability and validity despite inherent conflict. Modern welfare-economics merges the 'private vice and public good'-mechanism of Smith and Hume with Bentham's and Mill's objective norm of utility. Market-actors are perceived as strategic-rational actors trying to maximise utility, while the public good arises as an unintended consequence from the competition between these actors. This public good, furthermore, is understood in welfare-utilitarian terms. Although there are many different utilitarian norms to judge the public good, the most potent of them seems to be Pareto-efficiency (Sen 1979:488-9).[7] As such, with the risk of over-simplifying, we might say that the normative project of welfare-economics is to organise and regulate economic competition in such a way that the market is *rational*, i.e. the market is in Pareto-optimal equilibrium (Beckert 1996:806).

If this is the basic simplified model of modern welfare-economics, we recognise four facts that seem to problematise any direct analogy between politics and market. First, welfare economics perceives economic behaviour as a 'revealed preference' (Sen 1973:241;; 1977:322; 1992:495-8). This behaviouristic understanding must be explicitly separated from our action theoretical perspective. We should not so much object to the reduction of human action to strategic-action, as to the fact that in economic analysis behaviour is thought to 'reveal' strategic-rational action orientations of economic actors. The problem is not that people do not act strategically – they often do – the problem is rather that other subjective action orientations are dismissed *a priori* as irrelevant (Beckert 1996:804). Revealed preference theory, furthermore, is a tautological argument and therefore 'normatively empty' (Hubin 2001:451). Economic actors are pre-defined to be rational

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[7] The Pareto-rule states that if everybody prefers one social state above the other, it must be considered socially better (Sen 1976:217; 1977:319). The Pareto-rule not only includes the factual preferences of all but also a weak claim about moral-equality, i.e. nobody has the moral right to win at the cost of someone else.

utility-maximisers, which means that all behaviour *is* rational per definition and that only the market can be irrational.[8] While such simplified understanding of human action might be a tool – although not a particularly successful one – for predicting market *behaviour*, it should caution us with respect to political *action*.[9]

Second, the public good arising as an unintended consequence is perceived in terms of the utilitarian norm of Pareto-efficiency. This objective norm as the legitimate goal of politics has been severely criticised in normative political theory. Rawls most famously criticised utilitarian justice because its distributional indifference fails to deal with social inequality (Kymlicka 2002:10).[10] Indeed, equality of utility and preferences in a context of social inequality seems perverse from a normative standpoint. Social justice therefore often entails distributive claims implying zero-sum solutions instead of win-win solutions. On an even more fundamental level, Sen has shown in a thought-experiment that Pareto-efficiency and liberal values are not always compatible. From this 'Liberal-paradox' he concludes that Pareto-efficiency, and all other norms of utilitarian justice for that matter, cannot be the sole normative standard of social justice and political legitimacy in a liberal democracy (Sen 1970; 1976; 1974; 1979; 1992; 1993).[11] These fundamental attacks on Pareto-efficiency as a normative standard of validity have not resulted in a decline of its popularity in scholarly, political and public debate, to the contrary. These normative critiques therefore do not necessarily mean that Pareto-efficiency has no empirical value for political legitimacy, but we should at least be cautious that it is not normatively valid at face value.

Third, the objective norm of Pareto-efficiency concerns the validity of the market from an *outsiders-perspective*. The *internal validity* of the market is a far more complicated affair. A common explanation is that individuals accept the validity of the market because they perceive it to be in

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[8] Actors cannot escape rationality except through inconsistency as revealed preference theory must rely upon the idea of 'internal consistency' (Sen 1977:322-3). Internal consistency is nothing else than stating that if a person would choose X out of a set of (X,Y) then it is *inconsistent* that the same person would choose Y out of a set of (X,Y,Z). Sen provides several reasons why this idea of internal consistency at the core of traditional economics does not hold from which he subsequently argues that we must return to the original utilitarian idea of *subjective* utility-preferences (Sen 1992:495-502; 1973:247-252; 1977:322-5).

[9] As Weber already tried to show, strategic-rational economic action is *not* a natural given but rather a cultural phenomenon (2001). Strategic-rational assumptions are not only descriptive of human behaviour but also prescriptive. Interesting, in this regard, is the on-going discussion whether students of economic science act differently in game-theoretical experiments than other types of students (e.g. Marwell & Ames 1981; Frank et al. 1993; Yezer et al. 1996; Haucap & Just 2010; Bauman & Rose 2011).

[10] Sen additionally points out that the distributional questions are not only inter-personal, as in the work of Rawls, but also intra-personal, i.e. Sen points to the importance of time (1979:471).

[11] It sounds counterintuitive as *unanimity* or *win-win* sounds as a powerful reason to accept validity, but the problem lies in the distinction between just looking at preferences and looking at *why* people have these preferences and whether they should count (Sen 1976:239). The Pareto-rule is *context insensitive* and if justice demands us to be sensitive it forces us to consider additional *non-utilitarian information*. So, for example, from the perspective of the much analysed Prisoners' Dilemma a Pareto-optimal solution hardly relates to intuitions of justice if we assume that one of the prisoners is innocent. Context matters.

their interest. However, this explanation does not hold. When market actors are said to act strategic-rational, they calculate the best action based upon (secondary) costs and benefits. In order to do so, they must perceive the market as a social-empirical *fact*. As such, they do not evaluate *the market* in terms of their preferences, rather, they evaluate their *actions* in terms of preferences and factually given interest-configurations. In short, from within the market questions of market validity are not 'thematised', in Habermas' words (1975:5, 19). When actors do thematise the normative validity of the market, they no longer act as economic-actors, but rather as political-actors. Again, this makes any simple analogy between market and politics problematic as the validity of the market is already a political judgement.

Fourth, it may, however, be argued that faced with a collective action dilemma Pareto-efficient solutions may also be an *internal* standard of validity. In Rational Action Theory (RAT) actors are not merely perceived as utility-maximisers in a factual interest-configuration, but as rationally reflecting upon this structure itself – taking a 'second order' perspective. As such, actors may agree that a solution in which everybody is better-off and which avoids the so-called *tragedy of the commons* is rationally valid. This solution, however, must be externally guaranteed as it is vulnerable to 'free riders', to disintegrating forces. In classical RAT, especially where it concerns anonymous markets, this external guarantee is transposed to political and legal domination. Ostrom argues therefore that "the theory of collective action is *the* central subject of political science. It is the core of the justification for the state" (1998:1, emphasis in original). In other words, the centrifugal tendencies of an efficient market are *contained* by the political system. This obviously makes an analogy to the political system problematic as there is no external authority upon which politics can rely. Modern forms of RAT, it might be objected, rely less upon external guarantees of political domination, but rather emphasise the role of social institutions and cultural contexts (Ostrom 1998) or even reintroduce moral commitments separate from subjective utility-preferences (Sen 1977:337; 1996:62; 1985:188). These theories resonate readily with the neo-institutional approach in economics that claims that we must perceive markets as being 'socially embedded' (Granovetter 1985; Beckert 1996, 2003; Kripner 2001). As Sen puts it, traditional economic theory "has too little structure" (1977:335). Modern forms of RAT therefore often assume that social and political institutions rise in functional evolutionary terms as effective solutions to collective action problems, uncertainty, complexity and information problems (Ostrom 1998:8; Beckert 1996:814). These institutions are themselves the result of unintended consequences, of 'trial and error', and not constituted by conscious agreement among rational actors. However, by now we might wonder whether the market is still a useful analogy or has itself become a very complex theoretical and empirical sociological problem.

In conclusion, if the analogy between market and politics has the potential of providing us with new insights into political legitimacy, we must acknowledge from the start that all too simple and direct analogies are unsatisfactory. Nevertheless, the Pareto-norm and the explicit economic analysis of politics has been, and still is popular in political theory. In what follows, I want shortly to examine the types of political analysis this approach yields.

4.2.1 The Economisation of Political Theory

The norm of Pareto-efficiency is clearly visible in the contemporary works of Scharpf and Majone. Their works might be labelled as 'post-democratic theory' as Habermas calls it (2012:12). Political 'output' is not valid *because* it derives from a democratic process, but the democratic process ought to produce rational efficient output, regardless of whether this process emphasises democratic 'input' or post-democratic expert rule (Scharpf 1996:6). 'Input' and 'output' perspectives upon democratic legitimacy, according to Scharpf, are two 'complementary perspectives' of the same "normative premise that legitimate government must serve the 'common good' of the respective constituency" (1999:6; 2006:2).[12] Despite the normative problems of Pareto-efficiency Scharpf understands this 'common good' in Pareto-efficient terms, i.e. 'win-win solutions' for collective action problems have 'intrinsic legitimacy' (1997:7,21; 1999:11; 2000b:103; 2006:3).

With Pareto-efficiency as an intrinsic legitimate norm the primary theoretical question of this democratic realist approach, analogue to the economic sciences, concerns the *rationalisation* of the political decision-making process. The fear of irrational politics, as we have seen, has a long tradition in liberal democratic theory, but this has not necessarily generated agreement about the underlying problems. In what follows, I shortly want to discuss different theories of democratic realists in which they formulate and try to deal with rationality problems of modern democracy.

The early democratic realists, following Weber, especially feared the irrationality of the *mass-democracy* and the irrationality of a *politics of conviction*. In his explicitly economised political theory Schumpeter, for example, tried to address the irrationality of mass-democracy. The 'extra-rationality' or 'irrationality' of the masses, Schumpeter claims, obstructs any rational political output as the masses "are terrible easy to work up into a psychological crowd and into a state of frenzy in which attempt at rational argument only spurs the animal spirits" (1976 [1943]:257). As such, representative democracy, he states, is "simply the response to the fact that the electoral mass is incapable of action other than a stampede" (1976:283). Schumpeter argues that we must therefore

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[12] Scharpf also argues that the normative core of democracy is 'collective self-determination' (1996:6; 1997:19). Although this does play a significant role in his theory where it concerns empirical *legitimation* processes, collective welfare is the normative core of his concept of *legitimacy*. Nevertheless, Scharpf's work cannot simply be reduced to the market-analogy approach or simplistic notions of scientific expertise. In fact, as we will see, also pluralist and cybernetic approaches of democratic realism are simultaneously present in his work.

acknowledge that democracy in reality is not about 'government by the people' but 'government for the people' (1976:256). Democratic decisions are "not conform to 'what the people really want'" as decisions express not "a genuine but a manufactured will" (1976:251,263). Democracy is "the rule of the politician" in which "the will of the people is the product and not the motive power of the political process" (1976:285,263).

In Schumpeter's theory the rationality of democratic decisions is safeguarded by this 'division of labour' between 'voters outside parliament' and the 'politicians elect'. The 'primary function' of voters is to elect and to get rid of governments while the career politicians and political parties are in a "competitive struggle for power and office" – a competition for votes which 'fulfils its social function' "in the same sense as production is incidental to the making of profits" (1976:273,269,282). Schumpeter, then, defines the 'democratic method' as a rational response to the irrationality of the masses in which rational decisions rise as an unintended consequence from the competitive struggle between politicians. In Schumpeter's analysis, finally, political rationality can only be safeguarded to the extent that voters 'respect' the division of labour and "refrain from instructing" the elected representatives and to the extent that those "interests and ideals" are excluded from the political process "on which people refuse to compromise" (1976:295-6).[13]

That democracy is the "the institutionalised art of compromise" and that ideology and conviction are politically irrational was a claim widely shared in the 1940s (Smith 1942:2). Especially in the Anglo-Saxon world many scholars acknowledged the reign of 'philosophical scepticism' and 'political realism' (Pennock 1944:856). The popular English philosopher Joad, for example, concluded that democracy is "the least objectionable form of government … accepted less for its own merits than for fear that worse may befall if it be rejected" (Joad 1938:770). The 'democratic procedure' at least promised 'reasonable compromise' (Hallowell 1944:157). But democracy as compromise was more than merely an expression of scepticism and realism. Compromise, others claimed, is not just a 'necessity of life', but any political system that does not rely on compromise is 'dictatorship' (Smith 1942:1-2). Without a doubt, the pressing need in these days to defend and validate the less-than-perfect reality of democracy against rivalling ideologies such as fascism and communism can be seen as an explicit or implicit backdrop of many of these theories. When some concluded that "no

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[13] We should, however, be careful not to reproduce the usual accusations of Schumpeter as an uncompromising elitist. Schumpeter's work on democracy has been too eagerly appropriated by American political sciences to represent a 'value-free' model of democracy without taking notice of the accompanying sociological theory (Medearis 1997:819). The democratic model Schumpeter provided can only be properly understood in relation to how he perceived capitalist development. Indeed, Schumpeter foremost tried to debunk the 'classic' notions of a rational common good, an informed, equal and independent electorate and democracy as rule by the people, in a complex society ravished by corporate capitalism (Medearis 1997; Elliott 1994). As such, he was not so much claiming that 'the people' are irrational as that the traditional notion of rationality in a complex society is naive, if not mere myth.

systematic defence of democracy is possible" (Joad 1938:770), others argued that if there is no common interest, then compromise is not only second-best but 'desirable' in itself (Smith 1942:1).

While post-war democratic realists readily agreed with these early democratic realists, that the essence of democracy concerns compromise between conflicting interests, they were less inclined to take over Schumpeter's realist standpoints. Schumpeter argued that professional politicians are expected to make rational compromises, but that the distribution of political power (votes) does *not* reflect the 'genuine' preferences of the electorate as those preferences are manufactured by "psycho-technics of party management and party advertising, slogans and marching tunes" (Schumpeter 1976:283). These, Schumpeter warned, are not mere 'accessories', but "the essence of politics". Post-war theory, in contrast, perceived democratic politics as a *neutral* means to maximise *pre-political* preferences as can clearly be seen, for example, in Downs' market model of political party competition (1957), which is still widely used as the basic model for electoral analysis.

Downs wondered that if democracy is to 'maximise social welfare' "what reason is there to believe that the men who run the government would be motivated to maximise it?" (1957:136).[14] To answer this question, Downs claims that we must understand democratic politics in the direct analogy to the market model. Just as the driving force of economic 'efficiency' is man's "desire to earn income, not by any desire to benefit others", political efficiency must be based upon such motivational force as well (1957:136). Therefore, he presents a formal economic model of representative democracy – 'a general equilibrium theory' – that assumes that party competition and a self-interested electorate would result in actual political representation of the most commonly felt interests. Downs agrees with Schumpeter that 'government' is "an entrepreneur selling policies for votes", but disagrees about the irrationality of the voter (Schumpeter 1976:285; Downs 1957:137). The voter, for Downs, is a rational utility-maximiser who "estimates the utility income from government action he expects each party would provide him if it were in power in the forthcoming election period" (1957:138).[15] What ensures a *rational representation of interests*, then, are two processes perceived in the direct analogy to the market: the competitive struggle of political parties for 'income, prestige and power', on the one hand, and a strategic-rational exchange between voters and politicians or between votes and influence, on the other.

Downs' attempt to provide an economic model of democratic politics should, in my opinion, not so much be understood as some naïve idealisation of democracy. His aim is to model the

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[14] Downs explicitly acknowledges that Schumpeter was one of the few who actually addressed this problem (1957:136). He also admits that 'social welfare' is a controversial standard for rational politics: "it is not clear what is meant by 'social welfare', nor is there any agreement about how to 'maximize' it" (1957:136).

[15] Which means, according to Downs, that the voter must evaluate political parties *retrospectively* (1957:138).

irrationalities of democratic politics. He tries to show that in conditions of 'imperfect knowledge' "inequality of political influence is a necessary result" as it allows 'specialists' to bias opinion and that this political inequality explains why subsequent political decisions are less than optimal in social welfare terms (1957:137,139-41). Furthermore, Downs argues that it is not rational for voters 'to acquire political information' as "the trivial costs of procuring information outweighs its return" (1957:147).[16] The less than optimal output of the democratic process, Downs concludes, is a *collective action problem* in itself as it is rational for the individual voters to be collectively irrational (1957:148).

Notwithstanding these rationality problems of democracy, Downs provides the dominant welfare-economic model of democratic politics – a model in which rational output is evaluated by norms of welfare efficiency and in which the democratic process is subsequently evaluated by its ability to produce rational output. This general model also informs the theories of Scharpf and Majone. But where Downs tries to rationalise the 'input-side' of democracy, they directly try to rationalise the 'output-side'. Indeed, Scharpf claims that democratic input understood as 'majority rule' is "generally not welfare-efficient" (1997:20). He argues that a majority-rule only yields welfare-efficient output if voters are not strictly 'rational self-interest maximisers' (1997:20), but are "at least in part, oriented towards a notion of the 'common good'" (1999:20). As a consequence, Scharpf argues, democratic input-processes will only yield rational output if a "pre-existing sense of community" exists – a form of solidarity that explains the taming of strategic self-interest. If such solidarity is not available, different solutions must be found to rationalise democracy.

Disregarding the question of whether we think this argument is compelling – it is not – for Scharpf it means that to ensure output-rationality democratic institutions must be rationalised.[17] He takes the Madisonian model of checks and balances as the primary example of how procedural and institutional rules – mixed constitutions – limit majoritarian will formation and enlarge the possibility that political decisions will be welfare-efficient (1999:6; 1970:21; 2006:3). An open pluralistic political process with many veto-points ensures, according to Scharpf, that political conflict will yield Pareto-efficient solutions as an unintended consequence (1999:19-20). Veto-points assure that the

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[16] Also the economic argument that it is 'irrational' to vote, seems to resurface time and again. We might wonder what it means for the economic model of politics that people continue to vote nevertheless. Does it indicate that the economic model is not an accurate description of voting behaviour, i.e. voters are not utility-maximisers? Or does economic theory reduce strategic-rationality too much towards material self-interested preferences? In any case, we should at least admit that voting might not just be understood in future-oriented instrumental-preferences, but also in terms of present-time expressive-preferences (see below).

[17] If strategic utilitarian action is presumed, this traditionally begs the question of why people would not be *self-interested*. It forces us to explain why the interests of others are inherent to the preference function of the strategic individual. Not only might we criticise the tautological presumptions concerning strategic action underlying this model from our action theoretical perspective or that other-regarding action can solely be explained by pre-political solidarity, but more importantly, even model-intrinsic it can be shown that between self-interested and other-regarding 'games' strategic actors might play an 'assurance-game' (Sen 1996).

final decision will at least not make the actors involved worse-off as long as actors are willing to find a compromise.[18] However, such decision-making process of 'power-constraining' checks and balances comes into conflict with another norm of output rationality: problem-solving effectiveness necessitating 'action-enabling' institutional arrangements (Scharpf 1970:24; 1999:13; 2006:3-4).[19] The demand, not only for welfare efficient but also effective institutional arrangements, pushes Scharpf's argument towards post-democratic expert rule, an argument in which he is indebted to the works of Majone.

Majone claims that traditional democracy is not a rational mode of government in the complex conditions of late-modernity as it can neither produce credibility nor effectiveness (Majone 1999:5). Democratic accountable politicians fail to produce the credibility and effectiveness demanded by the market and society as they cannot credibly commit to long-term policies. Democratic rule, according to Majone, is 'government *pro tempore*', i.e. majoritarian rule cannot guarantee 'policy continuity' as government cannot bind the will of future governments let alone of the future majority (Majone 1997:153; 1999:4; 2000:288). In addition, as politicians cannot be shielded from the short-term preferences of their electorate they have "few incentives to develop policies whose success, if at all, will come after the next election" (Majone 1997:153; 2000:288). "'Short-termism' and poor credibility", according to Majone, are the irrational and 'intrinsic problems' of democracy (1999:4). If democracy cannot effectively solve long-term collective problems, it must be *rationalised*, according to Majone, by insulating "policy-making power" from the democratic process (Majone 2000:289; 1997:153). Decision-making power should be transferred to the experts in bureaucratic agencies and policy networks.

For this normative argument to hold, however, a "normative consensus on the validity of certain norms, or the desirability of certain outcomes" must be presumed (Scharpf 1997:21, 1999:16; Majone 1997:161). Output-rationality, Scharpf argues, is not about 'technical rationality' but about 'political-democratic rationality', which means it must be intrinsically related to the common interest (1970:26). Expert-rule, then, is a type of *exchange relation* – a 'contractual arrangement' (Majone 1997:147) – between the people (or their representatives) and non-democratic institutions. To counter the danger of 'technocratic paternalism' (Scharpf 2000:116) this contract, Majone argues, must have its own "forms of control and accountability", i.e. 'accountability by results' (Majone 1997:147,157; 1999:10). Through monitoring mechanisms such as "ongoing legislative and executive oversight, the budgetary process, judicial review, citizens' complaints, and peer review" these expert

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[18] As such we should clearly differentiate between Pareto-efficient and Pareto-optimal output. The latter is in no way guaranteed by a decision-making process characterised by veto-points.

[19] Majority-decision procedures, then, can be defended after all upon output-oriented arguments as it breaks with power-constraining demands of consensus (and the '*volenti non fit iniuria*' principle) (Scharpf 2000b:103).

institutions, it is claimed, acquire '*ex post*' democratic legitimacy (Majone:1999:14). Even if we accept this dubious normative argument, it is clear that a *contract* between society and politics based upon consensus, no longer seems to deal with political conflict.[20] In their attempt to rationalise democratic decision-making, political conflict seems to have disappeared altogether. We might say, conflict is no longer perceived as the *essential nature* of legitimate politics but as an *irrationality*. Rational, valid or legitimate politics is based upon consensus after all.

This emphasis upon consensus does not mean that Scharpf or Majone hold on to some archaic ideal of science or expertise. The idea that policy expresses maximised utility calculated by ordering all preferences and subsequently calculating optimal utility functions is an obvious myth. However, as late as the 1950s such *realism* still needed to be introduced into the policy sciences. Lindblom argued, for example, that policy formation is better described as 'muddling through', i.e. as incremental policy adjustments (1959; 1979). The idea that expertise yields unquestionable *optimal* welfare-efficient policy is not an accurate description of reality. Instead, both Scharpf and Majone understand expert rule more realistically in terms of 'policy networks' (Scharpf 1999:20; Majone 2000:297). Rationality, then, is not so much anchored in scientific method per se, as in the learning capabilities of the network itself, i.e. in the decision-making process. For Majone, this implies that these expert networks should be coordinated by 'a common regulatory philosophy', 'mutual trust' and some shared identity instead of a "bargaining style of decision-making" (Majone 1997:162). Also Scharpf points to the contemporary discussion that policy networks might enhance the possibility of rational decisions by consensual norms of deliberation (Scharpf 1999:20; see also Cohen & Sabel 1997; Héritier 2003; Papadopoulos 2003; Skogstad 2003). But if this means that policy networks are no longer about interest bargaining and compromise, but rather about argumentation that will ideally reveal the common good, conflict once again seems to have disappeared. Conflict only seems to be a temporary aberration until rational consensus reveals itself again. However, we need to be careful not to reproduce the dichotomy or dualism of conflict and consensus. What Majone and Scharpf try to show, is that we need not reduce politics *in practice* to outright conflict or to non-political consensus on values. Furthermore, there is also nothing wrong with 'expertising' democracy

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[20] Scharpf argues that *ex-post* public accountability implies 'electoral accountability' because "the central mechanism for assuring output legitimacy" "reinforces the normative orientation of office holders toward the public interest" (Scharpf 1999:14). For Scharpf, this means that "if the flow of decisions should clearly violate the intense preferences of broad majorities, electorally accountable office holders would still be able to override the expert judgement" (1999:15). The *empirical* argument then follows that "the lack of intervention can be interpreted as tacit acceptance" and as "popular support for – and hence as input-oriented legitimization of – the independence of these counter-majoritarian institutions" (1999:21). The whole argument is dubious, in my opinion, because non-majoritarian institutions can only address credibility-problems because they are relatively independent of the democratic process. "If interference with agency decisions entails only negligible costs, the agency is not independent" (Majone 1999:16). This means that the costs of democratic intervention might be prohibitive for strategic actors; passivity does not equal support. Postdemocratic theory cannot borrow from democratic theory at will.

and not just 'democratising' expertise. Nevertheless, there remains an inherent tension in these theories between presumed consensual normative standards and 'realist' claims about interest conflicts. When we want to move beyond the conflict/consensus dichotomy and cryptonormativism, it seems more appropriate to start with a purely empirical theory of legitimacy and one that is neither based upon conflict or consensus (see chapter 5 and 8).

This short discussion of economised political theories might not do justice to the individual arguments and theories, but does show four general problems of this approach. First, even when we would accept the normative argument that political legitimacy must be understood as welfare-efficiency, these theories remain committed to an *outsider's perspective* of legitimacy. Second, even when these models are based upon the idea of inherent and necessary political conflict, the conflictive nature of legitimate politics tends to disappear. This is related, third, to the dual tendency to exclude certain types of conflict from politics and to exclude politics from conflict. Concerning the exclusion of conflict from politics, if democracy must lead to rational compromise, this implies that all politics of conviction, all non-negotiable identity- or ideological politics must necessarily be excluded (Scharpf 1999:12,77). Furthermore, if rational output concerns Pareto-efficiency, *redistributive* conflicts or demands for justice must be excluded as well (Majone 1997:162, Scharpf 1997:21, 1999:71). Concerning the exclusion of politics from conflict, we have seen that where Schumpeter explicitly acknowledges the 'manufactured' quality of political interests, the economic model forces others to take over the rather problematic, if not naïve, notion that preferences are *pre-political* and politics merely the impartial means to aggregate these preferences. Finally, this economic approach of democratic realism remains utterly *cryptonormative*. Sometimes the normative intentions are made explicit, for example when Scharpf writes that his aim is to provide "an empirically informed, normative democratic theory" (1970:92, my translation). However, more often than not, the normative nature of these theories disappears behind the empirical analyses also provided. In sum, it is safe to say that the market analogy approach of democratic realism does not provide us with new insights into political legitimacy as we are trying to develop it in this thesis.

4.3 Pluralism: Conflict as Social Cleavage
The second approach of democratic realism is pluralism. The label pluralism, for sure, points to a broad school of democratic theory and my aim in this part is not to provide a full description of (neo-) pluralism. Rather, I discuss the works of Dahl, Lipset and Scharpf, with the more modest aim to illustrate the principle claims and arguments of pluralism where it concerns political legitimacy.

What is clear from the start, is that for the pluralists politics is inherently about conflict. Dahl warns that it might be 'attractive' to get rid of political conflict by proposing some 'harmony of interests', but that this is a 'dangerous illusion' (1982:186). This illusion urges people to be 'enlightened' and to discard their petty preferences in light of the general interest, but, as Dahl rightly argues, "on some questions, 'objective' conflicts of interest are sharp and real". As such, the pluralists differ from welfare political theories. Conflict is real – i.e. conflict is often a zero-sum game – and, still more, political conflict is "an inevitable and entirely *appropriate* aspect of political life" (Dahl 1982:187, my emphasis). Conflict, Lipset likewise argues, is 'the life-blood of the democratic system' (1959:91).

The main reason why political conflict is inevitable, according to Lipset, is that democracy is unable to categorically exclude group-interests to enter the political arena (1960:ix ff.). If political influence is, at least partly, an expression of the mobilisation of support, then political organisations and parties, according to Dahl, try to capitalise on latent interests of 'political groups or sub-cultures' (1978:196). This emphasis upon the mobilising function of democratic politics leaves open the question of whether political conflicts are strategically 'manufactured' in a Schumpeterian sense or reflect 'objective' interests in a critical sense. What is clear, though, is that political conflict is not about a competition of individual preferences, but about conflicting group interests – about *social cleavages*. Social and collective conflict, it must be clear, have destabilising and disintegrating tendencies precisely because collective conflict not only concerns material interests, but often also entails identity issues, questions of moral justice and diverging goals of alternative (economic, social and political) orders. The main question of the pluralists, then, is how to explain democratic stability despite the destabilising force of politically mobilised social cleavages. They must explain how democracy moderates conflict without supressing it (Lipset 1960:1).

It seems to me that the pluralists propose three general answers to the problem of democratic stability: 1) stability is explained in terms of structural conditions; 2) stability is explained directly by legitimacy itself; and 3) stability is explained by the political process of decision-making. Even if we are not principally interested in the 'problem of order' that is so central to the pluralist tradition, these answers do directly or indirectly imply specific conceptions of political legitimacy. Therefore, let us consider these arguments shortly to assess the role and nature of political legitimacy in each.

4.3.1 Structural Conditions and Crises of Legitimacy

The disintegrating force of political conflict depends, at least partly, upon the structure of the conflict, especially upon the 'cleavage pattern' (Dahl 1978:192).[21] When such a pattern is strictly 'bi-polar', Dahl claims, it will not lead to a stable democracy. When Dahl argues that such radical destabilising pattern is 'comparatively rare' (1978:192), Lipset is less complacent.[22] This difference, it seems to me, can be attributed foremost to the fact that Lipset embraces a more historical perspective. Democracy has not only been historically unsettled by major social conflicts, especially the 'class struggle', it has been threatened by counter-ideologies such as Communism, Fascism and traditional dictatorship (Lipset 1959:75,83,95). Even for Lipset, who claimed the 'end of ideology' in post-war modern democracy, the pull of 'totalitarianism' is not something to be contented about (1960:233).

Lipset recognises four 'critical cleavages' in the history of Western democracy, inherently related to the 'national revolution' (state-building) and the 'industrial revolution' – the former producing centre/periphery and church/state cleavages and the latter landed/commercial and capital/labour cleavages (1985:128; see also Dahl 1978:196).[23] Lipset claims that the way these fundamental *conflicts of modernity* were historical settled – either by compromise, revolution or suppression – explains the viability and stability of a political regime (1960:64-5). Democratic stability, in short, depends on the ways the interests of new cleavages were dealt with. According to Lipset, it is destabilizing when, on the one hand, new politically mobilised groups are denied political access, become politically isolated and in reaction develop extremist political ideologies, and, on the other, when the loss of status of the established traditional groups is not symbolically compensated (1959:87). It is easy to see how a downward spiral might ensue: the more access is denied, the more radical opposition becomes and the less symbolic compensation can be offered to the dominant strata. Suppression of conflict also increases instability to the extent that unsolved cleavages tend to accumulate upon new ones. Such 'accumulation' or 'superimposition' of cleavages and 'key-issues' "from one historical period to another makes for a political atmosphere characterised by bitterness and frustration'(Lipset 1960:79; 1959:92).

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[21] Lipset famously also tried to find cross-national comparative associations between democratic viability or stability and social-cultural preconditions – conditions concerning national wealth and distribution, industrialisation and urbanisation, education and literacy, or, in general, modernisation (1959:69; 1960:27-63). However, this analysis is less relevant for our main question.

[22] Dahl argues that most interest conflicts are neither 'perfectly harmonious' win-win situations nor exclusive 'zero-sum conflicts' (1982:188). Rather, he argues, most conflicts are 'imperfectly complementary', i.e. "for each actor the gains from cooperation with others outweighs the costs on balance" (*ibid*.).

[23] In earlier writing Lipset distinguished between three critical questions: (1) the role of religion within the nation; (2) universal suffrage and citizenship; and (3) distribution of national income (1959:92).

Suppressing new social cleavages or denying political access leads to instability precisely because it tends to lead to political extremism and the impossibility of compromise, i.e. it leads to *politics of conviction* (Lipset 1959:92). The more interest groups are denied political access and the more they are politically and socially isolated, the more they are prone, Lipset claims, to "a non-reflective habit of mind" while their political views are characterised by "rigid fundamentalism and dogmatism" (1960:98,100).[24] Social groups not just come to differ "on ways of settling current problems, but rather by fundamental and opposed Weltanschauungen" and come to perceive "the political victory of their opponents as a major moral threat" (1959:92). It is clear that in such circumstances 'political issues' can no longer be 'easily compromised' (1959:95).

How rising conflicts of modernity are historically settled, then, explains the structural conditions of political stability. What is more interesting to us, however, is that Lipset understands such "crisis of change" that occurs "during a transition to a new social structure" as a *crisis of legitimacy* (1960:64-5). This does not mean, however, that Lipset reduces legitimacy to a function of stability. Rather, Lipset tries to argue that the 'symbols of legitimacy' of the former regime are questioned with "the rise of sharp cleavages among groups which have been able ... to organise around different values than those previously considered to be the only legitimate ones for the total society" (1959:87). Avoiding political extremism and making compromise possible, then, not only seems to explain political stability, but also relates to political legitimacy in Lipset's argument. Compromise allows traditional symbols of legitimacy, at least partly, to be incorporated in the new regime. 'Gradual reformism' allows the preservation of legitimacy and allows the 'value-integration' of traditional and contending groups (Lipset 1959:92-3).[25]

Finally, not only the suppression of change, but also revolutionary change, according to Lipset, is prone to instability to the extent that the revolutionaries are politically mobilised upon 'over-exaggerated millennial hopes' which will proof difficult for the new revolutionary regime to live up to (1959:89). In other words, revolution easily leads to political disappointment, dissatisfaction and to new crises (Lipset 1959:87). This lack of '*political effectiveness*' of the new regime, according to Lipset, might also lead to a *legitimacy crisis* to the extent that the new regime does not have enough time "to develop legitimacy upon the new basis", to develop its own symbols and rituals (1959:87). To this extent, political legitimacy and political effectiveness are in a *compensatory relation*. Legitimacy, according Lipset, allows the political system "to survive the crises

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[24] Cross-pressures, for Lipset, are intrinsically related to cognitive 'sophistication': the unsophisticated are prone to "greater suggestibility, absence of a sense of past and future ..., inability to take a complex view, greater difficulty in abstracting from concrete experience, and lack of imagination" (1960:108).

[25] Lipset points to the fact that many successful democratic transitions in Europe preserved the monarchy and the 'loyalty' related to that conservative institution (1959: 85). "Thus, one main source of legitimacy lies in the continuity of primary conservative and integrative institutions during a transitional period in which new social institutions are emerging" (1959:88).

of effectiveness" and, vice-versa, if a political system is effective over a long period it might "develop new strong symbols of legitimacy" 'over a number of generations'(1959:86,91; 1960:69).

In sum, Lipset understands social cleavages and political conflicts as an expression of progressing modernity and tries to understand political stability in terms of the historical settlements of these conflicts. Stability is again explained in terms of compromise, i.e. the avoidance of extremism and politics of conviction. Finally, these crises of change are simultaneously also crises of legitimacy posing the question of how the process of conflict and change provides *structural opportunities* for new political regimes to obtain and develop their own symbols and rituals of legitimation. However interesting these questions, this perspective does not in itself provide us with a different understanding of political legitimacy. Indeed, Lipset understands legitimacy in this context in terms of the traditional 'veneration' of the political institutions (1959:89) – in short, in terms of a belief in the legitimacy of institutions of domination.

4.3.2 Political Legitimacy as a Constraint upon Conflict

When Lipset understands political legitimacy in Weberian-terms as legitimate domination, he can at least claim that political legitimacy "requires the manifestation of conflict" (1960:1). This does not mean that political conflict explains political legitimacy, but that suppression of conflict is the breeding ground of political extremisms and of possible crises of legitimacy. However, both Lipset and Dahl also explain democratic stability as directly founded upon political legitimacy itself. Political legitimacy, they claim, is a constraint upon political conflict because it expresses a *value consensus*. "[W]ithout consensus ... there can be no democracy", Lipset argues (1960:1), while Dahl claims that democratic stability calls for a specific 'political culture' – for 'beliefs and presupposition' supporting 'democratic ideas, values and practices' 'transmitted from one generation to the next' (1998:157; see also 1961:316-7; 1982:62). Political legitimacy, then, is an *integrating* force where the disintegrative forces of political conflict is 'a constant threat' (Lipset 1959:1). A stable democracy, according to Scharpf, requires a stable 'consensus' on 'regulative structures and principles' distinguished from "political conflicts over particular issues" (Dahl 1982:160-1).

In short, political legitimacy is a normative consensual constraint upon political conflict. It, of course, makes sense to analytically distinguish between 'issues' and 'regulative structures'. However, instead of acknowledging that regulatory structures are also continuously contested and only agreed to *for the time being*, legitimacy for the pluralists explains why citizens are not only motivated by 'egoism', but also by "'moral' judgements about what would be best for the collectivity" (Dahl 1982:161). Just as Weber, they try to understand political stability in terms of the belief in legitimacy. But, in contrast to Weber, they specifically understand such beliefs in terms of a *value consensus*.

This, it seems to me, is a definitive step back as the pluralists do not make the important analytical distinction between objective and subjective validity that Weber introduced. Separating between objective democratic norms and subjective beliefs at least opens up political legitimacy to value plurality and heterogeneity. But more important in this context, when political legitimacy is considered to be a normative consensual constraint upon political conflict, this implies that, first, conflict threatens to be delegitimised and, second, that if politics is inherently about conflict then legitimacy is depoliticised. Indeed, legitimacy seems to be an *a-political* boundary upon political conflict. In either case, it does not yield a different understanding of political legitimacy. What we can learn, though, is that if we separate between political contest on issues and contests on regulative structures, we might be able to keep politics *and* <u>legitimacy</u> open to contestation without necessary disintegrating tendencies. This, however, calls for a different approach emphasising politics as coordination or as argumentation (see chapter 5 and 8).

4.3.3. Political Mobilisation and Influence: Cap and Filter

The third and final answer to the problem of order is the answer that pluralism is most known and renowned for – it concerns the analysis of political interest organisations and their influence in the democratic decision-making process. Especially Dahl explicitly argues against both the simplistic idea that the people indirectly govern through political representation and party competition, and the pessimistic idea that democracy is in reality rule by the elite (1961:5-6; 1966:296). As such, the pluralists argue against the elitism of scholars like Schumpeter as well as the formalism of scholars like Downs. Instead, the answer to the question of 'who actually governs' is thought to be more complicated (Dahl 1961).

According to the pluralists neither the people nor the elite govern, but rather political interest organisations. This does not mean that pluralism denies the importance of political representation or general elections. Instead, democratic politics for the pluralists is not only about the *political theatre* of electoral mobilisation and party competition, but also about the *political game* of backstage strategic negotiations between professional politicians and organised interest (Dahl 1961:1). Nor does pluralism deny political inequality – "political resources other than the vote are unequally distributed" (Dahl 1982:170). And precisely because the vote is only one and often an 'insufficient' political resource to influence the political decision-making process, this implies that not every interest of preference counts equally in a democracy. The idea that political output is justified in norms of Pareto-optimality is therefore naïve – democracy is neither rule by the people nor for the people. However, as Dahl rightly argues, this inequality does not necessarily lead to elite-

rule as long as nobody is entirely without politically relevant resources and no single resource distribution dominates all others (1961:228).[26]

Political influence on the decision-making process, the pluralists claim, is a function of control over political resources. Vice-versa, political resources are those resources that can be used to influence the political process (Dahl 1998:177; 1961:226). Political resources include "physical force, weapons, money, wealth, goods and services, productive resources, income, status, honour, respect, affiliation, charisma, prestige, information, knowledge, education, communication, communications media, organisations, position, legal standing, control over doctrine and belief, votes, and many others" (Dahl 1998:177). Much can be said about this resource-based understanding of political influence, but for our argument we might limit ourselves to three important insights based upon the work of Bader (Bader 1991; Bader & Benschop 1988).

First, political influence is not only a function of (a) control over resources, but also of (b) the willingness to employ these resources, (c) the competence to use these resources strategically, and (d) the symbolic presentation and credibility of a threat or promise. This means that the sheer possession of a political resource does not directly indicate political influence. Resources are only *potential resources*. Second, which type of resources is effective very much depends upon the specific policy field, the specific political arena and the specific stage in the policy-making process in which influence is sought. Third, control over political resources can be effective in the policy-making process because it allows one to make *direct* promises or threats or because it enables one to influence the policy process *indirectly* by setting the cognitive and normative boundaries of solutions or problems. The first type of resources, for example, allows the wealthy political influence by financing political campaigns, business organisations by threatening to leave the country and labour unions by threatening with strikes or promises of wage-restraint. The second type of resources points to knowledge, prestige or credibility which allow actors to influence the cognitive and normative facts of a certain policy or problem. Such actors might be (pseudo-)scientific think tanks, expert organisations, professional organisations, publicists and scientists, charismatic politicians, but also the famous and the successful.

Although effective political resources might be controlled by a single private actor, more commonly *organisation* allows the combination and coordination of the relatively ineffective resources of the many into a single effective political resource. Organisation is one of the few resources that even the powerless have in a democracy. Although Dahl warns it is 'witless' to argue that this implies they "can always escape domination", it does mean that by cooperation and organising the few resources they have, "however pitiful they may be", they "can sometimes push

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[26] It does problematize the belief in democratic values if "the moral foundation of democracy, political equality among citizens, is seriously violated" (Dahl 1998:178).

the costs of control" and influence the political decision-making process (1982:34-5). The importance of this process in Dahl's theory cannot be underestimated. Precisely these emancipatory processes – processes through which the powerless and the marginalised organise themselves and 'struggle for autonomy' – explains the historical rise of pluralism (Dahl 1978:191). Democratic pluralism points to "the existence of a plurality of relatively autonomous (independent) organisations ... within the domain of the state" (Dahl 1982:5).

What explains stability in a pluralist democratic system is not some necessary value consensus, but overlapping memberships and the existence of cross-cutting cleavages (Lipset 1985:151). Interest heterogeneity avoids destabilising cleavage patterns as interest fragmentation leads to 'cross-pressures' (Lipset 1960).[27] The less groups are socially isolated, the more they are integrated into mainstream society because their demands are partially met, the more they are exposed to cross-pressures, the less 'committed' they are to one political cause or 'historic truth' (Lipset 1995:83,95). But the argument is not just that a stable democracy needs interest heterogeneity as a structural pre-condition, but that the democratic decision-making process *explains* interest fragmentation and stability. The democratic decision-making process, we might say, is both a *filter* on interests as it is a *cap* on conflict.

To appreciate the democracy as cap and filter, let us shortly take a look at what Dahl calls 'ethnic politics'. Dahl depicts immigrants as being 'at the bottom of the pile' and frustrated with the dominant values of society (the American creed) and the unequal status of their culture (Dahl 1961:33). To overcome the 'handicaps and humiliations' Dahl describes how the *political entrepreneur*, in a strategic search for a loyal electorate, tries to politically mobilise this latent social cleavage on an ethnic political platform. This type of politics, then, mobilises ethnic interests and conflict even if the ultimate goal might be recognition and acceptance (Dahl 1961:33). The political leaders and their ethnic electorate, Dahl claims, are not demanding the equalization of the distribution of socio-economic or political resources, but are demanding the end of discrimination within this unequal distribution (1961:33-4). Whether we accept this claim, the most important mechanism, at this point, is that the very *success* of ethnic politics in terms of increased political influence and, hence, in favourable political *output*, ultimately destroys the very foundation of ethnic politics. The socio-economic homogeneity of the ethnic group, which allowed political mobilisation and organisation of group interests is destroyed by the very success of political action. Political success translates into increased interest heterogeneity – i.e. cross-pressures – making

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[27] The social integrative mechanism of 'cross-pressures' is, without a doubt, something that Lipset emphasises most often in his work. He credits Simmel to be the first to have discovered this mechanism but that 'social research' neglected it (1959:96, 1985:117). We have, of course, also perceived similar arguments in the work of Madison.

political mobilisation more difficult. From this it follows that ethnic politics is a transitional phenomenon (Dahl 1961:34).

The very nature of the democratic decision-making process, characterised by *influence* and *resources*, explains that the very success of political mobilisation based upon social cleavages ultimately undermines its. Democracy is a *cap* on conflict. Lipset also argues along similar lines that the "compromising character of political power" is "self-destructive because politicians in office necessarily must alienate support in deciding among conflicting interests" (1960:295-6). However, Lipset is less confident and in addition emphasises, like Weber, the *responsibility* of political leaders.[28] Responsible leadership, according to Lipset, has to deal with the dialectic of political mobilisation and influence, on the one hand, and the willingness to negotiate and compromise, on the other – a dialectic between representation and integration (Lipset 1960:74,391; see also Dahl 1982:44). We might say, that political leaders have to deal with the dialectic between *political theatre* and the *political game*.

When democratic decision-making is a cap on social-political conflict, it is, according to Dahl, also a filter as not every interest or every interest conflict is equally capable of entering the political arena. It is at this point, however, that Dahl's work tends to become *cryptonormative*. Dahl claims that to the extent that political inequality is 'dispersed' throughout society, i.e. political power is not in the hand of the few (1961:227-8, 277) – and to the extent that people have reasonable opportunities to organise themselves politically, a pluralist democratic system always address those problems which are most salient and pressing. The fact that political resources are not equally distributed is less problematic if one understands that "a political resource is only a *potential* source of influence" (1961:271). What really matters, according to Dahl, are someone's 'subjective reasons' and his 'objective situation' (Dahl 1961:274-275). The former points to whether someone is willing to use his resources not for his private or civic life, but for political action, while this subjective willingness, according to Dahl, is a function of someone's 'objective condition', i.e. his social-economic situation.

Dahl uses the social situation of Afro-Americans to proof this claim. He sees Afro-Americans in the U.S. as being still in the transitional stage of ethnic politics, and without many resources besides political ones (Dahl 1961:293). Dahl therefore expects that they will "employ their resources more in political action than the average white person does" (Dahl 1961:294). Seeing this hypothesis neatly confirmed in his data, Dahl concludes that even though African-Americans have limited

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[28] Even if Lipset claims that this stabilising process does not denote some social law, it is nevertheless the main mechanism that explains for Lipset the 'end of ideology' (1985:81ff.;1960:439). It could be argued that the end of ideology thesis, if not a necessity, is for Lipset an inherent consequence of successful and stable democracies.

general resources they do have some political resources and are able to use them. Indeed, because of their 'objective situation' they have a greater tendency to deploy these recourses. In other words, the more socially marginalised, discriminated or frustrated the higher the chance that one will spend resources for political action. According to Dahl, whether one is 'Homo politicus' instead of 'Homo civicus', whether one will spend one's resources for a political cause instead for private goals depends upon one's objective social condition and must be seen in terms of some strategic utility calculation (see also Krouse 1982:448-9).[29] For *Homo civicus*, political action "as a strategy to achieve his gratification indirectly ... will seem considerably less *efficient* than working his job, earning more money, ... planning a vacation, moving to another neighbourhood or city, or coping with an uncertain future in manifold other ways" (1961:224, my emphasis).

To understand the democratic decision-making process as a *filter* on the kinds of interest that are able to enter the political arena is, it seems to me, a reasonable claim. More problematic, however, is when we turn this relation up-side down: those interests that enter the political process are the interest that ought to matter. Especially disastrous would be a behavioural account in which the *lack of political action* or protest is seen as an indicator of satisfaction with democratic politics. But we should not make a straw man of Dahl. His project of formulating a normative model to 'maximise' democracy without denying real and existing political inequality is laudable (1966:302). Dahl is quite aware – or increasingly became aware – that there might be structural and organisational biases in existing democratic regimes that counter his normative argument.[30] Democratic pluralism, in short, does not deny the possibility of a critical theory in which more attention might be paid to depoliticisation processes and 'manufactured' and objective interests.[31]

Despite this critical possibility, however, there is a strong tendency in pluralist theory to understand *political apathy* as an indicator of political legitimacy. Lipset, for example, explicitly argues that low levels of political participation might be interpreted as a sign of political satisfaction

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[29] Although Dahl states that "*Homo civicus* is not, by nature, a political animal", it seems to me that we should not read this as if *Homo civicus* and *politicus* are essentially different by nature (1961:225). In Dahl's theory, citizens might not be political animals by nature but given certain objective conditions they can *temporarily* become political because it is more efficient to do so. This means that *Homo civicus* and *Homo politicus* are conditioned by objective circumstances.

[30] Dahl is aware that "major public problems go unsolved" (1978:199). Dahl recognised at least "four problems of democratic pluralism: they [i.e. political organisations] may help to stabilize injustices, deform civic consciousness, distort the public agenda, and alienate final control over the agenda" (1982:40). It is also worthwhile to note that Dahl also worries about the immense resources available to non-democratic capitalist corporations with their clear and distinct interests (as opposed to the diffuse interests of the majority): "On the landscape of a democratic country great corporations loom like mountain principalities ruled by princes whose decisions lie beyond the reach of the democratic process" (1982:194)

[31] Dahl recognises the validity of concepts such as 'false consciousness' and 'objective interests' (1982:163-164).

(1960:185,227).[32] Indeed, a low voter-turnout, he claims, points to the 'end of ideology' in modern democracy in which "the fundamental political problems of the industrial revolution have been solved" (1960:442). However, if we rightly object to such cryptonormativism, a more interesting relation between political legitimacy and mechanisms of political pluralism presents itself. Political legitimacy is neither indicated by political apathy nor a function of democratic stability, rather political apathy and *depoliticisation* processes explains democratic stability and *decreases the need for political legitimation*.

This latter argument, it seems to me, can be seen both in the works of Lipset and Scharpf. Both argue that there is an inherent relation between *political effectiveness* and *political legitimacy*. Lipset defines political legitimacy as "the *capacity of the system* to engender and maintain the belief that the existing political institutions are the most appropriate ones for the society" (1960:64, my emphasis). It shows that legitimacy is a characteristic of the political system. Political effectiveness, on the other hand, is defined in terms of output-satisfaction – "the extent to which the system satisfies the basic functions of government as defined by the expectations of most members of a society" – and problem-solving effectiveness – the extent to which social problems and conflict can be effectively solved before they transform into sources of major instability (1959: 86; 1960:64).[33]

Political effectiveness, so much is clear, is a *depoliticising* force as it undermines the need for and the possibility of political mobilisation by interest satisfaction and fragmentation. Lipset argues that output effectiveness increases 'political tolerance' as "it does not matter greatly which side rules" (1959:84). Political tolerance, it seems, must be understood in terms of political satisfaction and indifference. For Scharpf, it means that political effectiveness – political output – decreases demands for legitimation.[34] Indeed, what is at stake is not political *legitimacy* so much as political *legitimation* – it is about political argumentation (Scharpf1997:21; 2006:11). Indeed, Scharpf's theory is not just a normative account of output- or input-legitimacy, his empirical theory concerns "input- and output-oriented legitimating arguments [which] only come into play if a policy violates political salient constituency interests" (2006:3). The need for legitimation is a function of saliency

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[32] For sure, Lipset also argues that "lack of participation and representation also reflects lack of effective citizenship and consequent lack of loyalty to the system as a whole" and "always means under-representation of socially disadvantaged groups" (1960:227).

[33] Lipset differentiates political effectiveness from the "efficiency of the total system" – i.e. economic prosperity – although that does increase the possibility of political effectiveness by enlarging its resources and easing political compromise (1959:86). Lipset is aware, however, that the economy can also be "disruptive and centrifugal" (1960:23).

[34] Scharpf explicitly claims that the 'positive interpretation of political apathy' by the pluralists is not something that can be 'model immanently' proven (1970:43). Instead, he argues that increased electoral participation would require a normative defence of pluralism 'on better grounds' (1970:66ff.). Nevertheless, Scharpf also claims that a "lack of [public] intervention can be interpreted as 'tacit acceptance'" or as 'popular support"(1999:21).

and depoliticisation. In other words, *legitimation problems* are "not a general problem", but depend upon a 'permissive consensus' or the saliency of interests (Scharpf 1997:21-2, 2000b:120, 2006:11).

In conclusion, we might analyse the democratic decision-making processes as caps and filters on interests and conflicts. These processes might explain political stability, but if we stay clear of cryptonormativism, they do not explain political legitimacy.[35] If nothing else, pluralism and output-effectiveness might explain different *needs of political legitimation*. This, however, does not point to the political game of strategic interest bargaining and compromise, so much as the political theatre in which political actions and decisions have to be justified. If anything, it points to the dramaturgy of politics – to the 'plebiscitary' basis of democratic legitimation (Scharpf 1970:75-6) or to politics as argumentation (see chapter 7 and 8).

4.3.4. Conclusion on Pluralism

The pluralist branch of democratic realism provides us with interesting analyses of politics as conflict and political legitimacy. However, the principle question of pluralists is the problem of democratic stability in face of social conflicts and cleavages. The dominance of this question threatens to reduce political legitimacy to a mere function of stability – an argument in which political apathy is understood as political support – or it conceptualises legitimacy as an apolitical consensus that binds political conflict. Both arguments do not seem to help our analysis. On the other hand, pluralist theory does provide interesting analyses of the *opportunity structures* of political legitimacy and differing *legitimation needs*. Such analyses, it seems to me, are helpful and important because, as stated before, questions of political legitimacy cannot be separated from social and political order. The pluralist tradition, especially in a critical variant, is able to provide us with a realistic description of democratic politics in which conflict, inequality and influence, as well as politics as theatre and politics as game play crucial conceptual roles. However, the pluralist tradition does not seems to provide us with any new understanding of political legitimacy.

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[35] One could argue that Lipset also claims that pluralist politics not only leads to cross-pressures and stability, but that such integrative force also connotes 'value-integration'. It seems, at times, that Lipset's understanding of value-integration is inspired by Durkheim (1985:20ff.). Famously, Durkheim does not understand society as the sum of its part, not even as more than the sum of its parts – as is the case for Weber's objectively valid institutions – but rather that *the parts express the whole*. For Durkheim, the mere existence of society seems to indicate the value integration of individuals into the 'conscience collective' (Durkheim 2004:60). Society is the moral force that binds the 'bottomless abyss' of individual self-interest (Durkheim 2004:70). Society, it seems, *is* legitimacy. Durkheim's sociology, in comparison to Weber's, belongs to the other side of the so-called 'neo-Kantian divide' and is so far removed from the social action perspective I am trying to develop here, that I will not discuss this reading at this point (see Zaret 1980:1181; Coutou 2009: 566; Rose 1995).

4.4 Cybernetics: Conflict as Political Dissatisfaction

Already in the pluralist branch of democratic realism have we seen that political output or political effectiveness is analysed in relation to political legitimacy. However, as discussed, this relation must be understood in terms of opportunity structures or mutual compensation. In contrast in the cybernetic branch, specifically in the works of Easton, the relation between output-effectiveness and political legitimacy is formally analysed and, more importantly, understood in *causal* terms. Easton claims that political effectiveness can 'spill-over' into political legitimacy (1965:275,320,343,403,465; 1975:446; 1976:436).

Easton introduced his formal model of politics in his book *A System Analysis of Political Life* (1965), which even today still has a significant impact on political science, especially on quasi-behaviouristic empirical studies (see e.g. Dalton 1999; Dalton 2004; Norris 1999; Klingeman 1999). Nevertheless, this model is more complicated and, at times, confused, than these contemporary studies usually want us to believe. It can be claimed on good grounds that contemporary models ignore many of the assumptions and analytical goals that preoccupied Easton without providing the necessary theoretical justifications.[36] In other words, Easton's model is often misused, something he himself already complained about (1976:444ff.). Easton, however, contributed to the confusion, when he changed in the 1970s some of the core concepts of his 1965 theory without explicitly acknowledging this. In my opinion, these changes were required as the original work under-theorised many of the fundamental concepts that draw scholarly attention. In the following analysis I will not address all these issues – although they deserve attention – but will limit myself to an understanding of Easton theory regarding the relation between political legitimacy and effectiveness – a relation, as we will see, that is complex enough.

4.4.1 Political Survival and the Cybernetic Method

Easton develops his system approach, in contrast to the economic models, by clear and acknowledged biological analogies. Perhaps the most expressive analogy is that of the body (Easton 1957:386).[37] The goal of the body is to survive. To do so it must receive *inputs* from the environment, e.g. food. At the same time, this environment can also *stress* the body, e.g. as food runs scarce. There is a *critical range* where input-stress threatens the core function of the body, its survival. The body, we might say, is in crisis. However, input is also a form of communication as input gives

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[36] For one thing, Easton stresses that he aims for a "general theory" or "united theory of politics" – we might say an analytical theory – and not a genuine theory that "explain the observable lower-order structures of a specific system" (1957:400; 1990:122; 1965:488). If anything, his model awaits empirical validation and *not*, as is common nowadays, a theory with witch to interpret empirical data.

[37] Although cybernetic system analysis is inspired especially by ecological systems, the biological body is a more apt analogy. Ecological systems, after all, are foremost reactive and not reflexive or pro-reactive – a quality that the political system does possess.

information about stress and the environment. So, if food is scarce and input low, the body knows its survival is threatened and can therefore *act* to alleviate the stress. Its actions are *outputs* through which the body tries to deal *effectively* with stress. So, in our example, the body might search for food elsewhere. The more reflexive the body – it has intelligence – the more such stress will be dealt with in advance, maybe by prospective behaviour (e.g. by keeping food in stock) or by manipulating the environment (e.g. through cultivation). To the extent that these outputs, these actions, are successful stress will decrease.

This very simple example shows the core of system equilibrium theories: by perceiving the relation between the system and the environment in terms of input and output exchanges one could analyse how this system tries to hold its core functions outside their critical range. If successful, the system remains in a dynamic equilibrium with its environment.[38] Easton's object of analysis, then, is nothing less than the "life processes of a political system" – an analysis of politics from the perspective that the ultimate goal of a political system is 'survival' (1965:vii,15-8).[39] If the ultimate goal is survival, then the defining functions of a political system – of 'political life' – according to Easton, are "those interactions through which values are authoritatively allocated for a society" (1965:21; see also 1957:383; 1953:129). This definition sets the analytical boundaries of the political system and is consciously echoing Lasswell's definition of 'who gets what, when, and how' (Easton 1965:474-5; 1976:435; 1953:131). The explicit addition – besides the explicit framing in terms of 'values' – is the emphasis on *authoritative* allocation. Based upon this emphasis we might assume that Easton perceives politics in terms of legitimate domination. However, also for Easton the nature of politics is inherently about conflict as "conflicts over demands constitute the flesh and blood of all political systems", without it there is no need for a political system (1965:48). Indeed, Easton considers the 'centrifugal tendencies' created by political conflict and social cleavages to be the

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[38] It must be noted that Easton considered his own theory *not* as an equilibrium theory. He claims that : (1) such theories take a normative stance where he does not (1965:13); (2) he claims that self-adjusting systems are 'unlikely' (1965:364, 20); and (3) he understands equilibrium in limited terms of 'stability' or status-quo (1965:21; 1956:98). Yet, he does argue that a specific form of system equilibrium based upon biological life, i.e. an 'equifinal' equilibrium, holds the possibility to develop a 'formal model of equilibrium' (1956:97-9). It seems that this is exactly the aim of Easton's 1965 formal model of political life. The undefined status of this model attracted some critique as Easton does not explicate a motivational force that propels the 'political invisible hand', and neither some kind of generalising media that enables system equilibrium, i.e. the political equivalent of money (see Sorzano 1975; Lewis 1974). This critique is relevant especially in comparison with Parsons, who explicitly tried to found such symbolic form of communication in the guise of 'influence' (Lewis 1974:674; see also chapter 5). However, I think that Easton understands system equilibrium in terms of some kind of evolutionary approach where successful systems adjust to historical changes and survive, while unsuccessful systems perish (see e.g. 1965:123).

[39] Easton later admitted that this emphasis on stability or survival seems to limit his ideas about legitimacy to those that only reify the factual system. He argued that there should be more room for 'change' and contest – 'new ideals and new visions' – without making change a 'residual category' (1976:447).

primary sources of system stress (1965:233,250). Political survival might also be defined by the political ability to deal with conflict.

As such, it is fairly easy to perceive Easton's affinities with pluralism. However, according to Easton, where pluralism "draws attention to those interactions in a political system through which members use their power to maximise political benefits and minimise losses", it is systems theory that draws attention to conditions under which this allocation is possible at all (Easton 1976:435; also 1965:474-5). Cybernetic system theory therefore tries to analyse a political system as an open system embedded in an environment between which "flows a constant stream of events and influences that shape the conditions under which the members of the system must act" and to which the system must 'adapt' and 'respond' in order to survive (Easton 1965:18). Inputs for the political system concern political *demands* and political *support* deriving from the environment, while outputs concern political *actions*, especially the "decisions and actions of the authorities" (Easton 1965:26-8).

Obviously, we will have to look at the precise meanings of these concepts. For now, we can say that political demands increase system stress – not least because they often express social cleavage and interest conflicts – while support alleviates stress. Political actions, then, are the means through which the system tries to "grapple actively, aggressively, and constructively with its environment" "to modify the supportive conditions under which the system is operating" (Easton 1965:467-8). If these are the core concepts of Easton's political model, then the basic question is how a political system can survive in an environment characterised by social conflict. Part of the answer concerns the function of political legitimacy, political effectiveness and, especially, the relation between the two. In what follows I will analyse and, if needed, reconstruct these answers.

4.4.2 Political Input: Demands, Conflict and Stress

A demand, for Easton, is part of the political input and concerns "an expression of opinion" from the environment that the political system "should or should not" make a binding decision (Easton 1965:38). It expresses in words or action that the government ought to implement or discard a specific policy or more general ought to solve some social problem. Demands "constitute one of the major sources of stress" (1965:37). However, private preferences or wants only become political demands to the extent that citizens publicly express "expectations or desires that binding decisions should be taken" (1965:73). Even more importantly, a political demand is not very stressful until it transforms into a *political issue* (1965:76). This conversion of wants into demands and finally into issues, according to Easton, is regulated by mediating institutions – political parties, interest

organisations and opinion leaders – and the 'political culture' which determines what is appropriate for 'governmental intervention' (1965:95,84,100).

Demands stress the political system in two different but related ways. First, demands are stressful when they are expressive of social cleavages and allocative issues which the political system has difficulty to satisfy. Second, demands may be too demanding, too complicated or just unrealistic, on the one hand, or the authorities ignorant, incompetent or unwilling, on the other. In this case, there is not so much the stress of social conflict as the stress of political dissatisfaction through perceived political ineffectiveness. Instead of horizontal social conflict between groups there is vertical conflict between (part of) society and the authorities.

Where it concerns horizontal social conflict, Easton takes over a clear pluralist analysis. He emphasises the function of responsible political leaders, who should avoid 'totems and taboos', i.e. subjects with "socially disruptive potential" threatening "to generate considerable cleavage among the members" (1965:106). However, Easton does not argue that political elites should not be responsive. In analogy to Lipset, Easton acknowledges that unsatisfied demands and ignored conflicts may lead to a "build-up of a backlog of latent demands" as possible "violent modes of expressing demands" (1965:122). If anything, elites should be pre-emptive, i.e. satisfying wants before they become demands or issues (1965:230,363,404). Conflicts of interest, then, are ideally dealt with through *non-salient* compromise by political mediators, 'anticipating' wants and demands of citizens and alleviating "cleavage stress" by reducing demands or 'atomizing' interests through "cross-pressures" (1965:257,266,225). When cleavage conflicts do become salient, Easton argues that authorities must appeal to political *legitimacy* (diffuse support). Legitimacy, again, is the integrative boundary upon disintegrative conflicts.

In short, Easton clearly recognises social cleavages as potential sources of political stress and his theory is clearly inspired by pluralists models. However, I claim that his cybernetic method nevertheless seems to stress a different kind of political conflict: the conflict between system and environment or between 'state' and 'society'. First of all, demands are not stressful per se, only *unfulfilled demands* are stressful as they might lead to political dissatisfaction (1965:57). Political stress, for Easton, is a function of "the volume and content of demands" and "the responses available to a system for meeting and handling such demands" (1965:70). This means that horizontal social conflict might explain political dissatisfaction, but not all political dissatisfaction is caused by social cleavages. More importantly, in Easton's model political stress *per definition* expresses itself in vertical political dissatisfaction.

Secondly, when Easton analyses the contemporary crisis of democracy he is not so much worried about social cleavages, but about 'demand overload' and the "revolution of rising

expectations" (1965:58,68,90,110,466). Easton fears that rising demands and not so much social conflict undermine the effectiveness of the political system, i.e. the ability to address, solve or satisfy demands (1965:38). Easton, then, seems to worry about rising demands in a 'post-ideological' or 'post-industrial' liberal democracy – a worry that was readily shared by other political theorists (see Huntington 1975; Crozier et al. 1975; Bell 1977).

Finally, Easton seems to claim that citizens are generally passive spectators outside the political system that is guarded by 'gatekeepers' (1965:88). Citizens are only inside the political system when they are politically active and express their support and demands 'unmediated'. Citizens, then, are partly inside and partly outside the political system moving between "political and non-political roles" which seems to parallel Dahl's distinction between *Homo politicus* and *Homo civicus* (Easton 1965:53).[40] In short, emphasising the stressful relation between a political system and its environment seems inherently to imply that the primary conflict analysed concerns the *vertical relation* between the active and the passive or between 'state' and 'society'.

4.4.3 Political Support: Functional Behaviour or Subjective Evaluation

A political system, to recapitulate, is stressed according to Easton when it no longer manages "to induce most members to accept … [its] allocations as binding" (1965:22). Political demands, furthermore, are stressful for the political system because unsatisfied demands can lead to a decline in political support (1965:57). Political support, then, can best be understood in relation to stress. Support, this cannot be emphasised enough, concerns for Easton the acceptance of binding decisions on whatever grounds. Support, in the first instance, concerns *functional behaviour*.[41] Acceptance, as such, may be based upon force, fear, strategic interests, political apathy or upon

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[40] At this point especially, however, Easton's rather sloppy treatment of the analytical boundaries of a political system is confusing. Easton on the one hand differentiates a political system between two institutional sub-systems: 1) the formal system making and executing binding decisions; and 2) a sub-system consisting of mediators between society and government, especially including political parties and interest organisations (1965:374,95). On the other hand, Easton also distinguishes in his general analysis between three 'political objects' within the political system: the political community *which includes citizens*, the regime and the authorities (1965:157;1957:391). Contemporary research especially took over these three objects (Dalton 2004; Norris 1999). I would argue, however, that Easton is better grasped by taking over the pluralist analysis of politics as theatre and game, to which the formal decision-making system is added as a third sub-system. Similarly, we should also criticize Easton's simplistic treatment of 'environment'. Although he admits it is possible to differentiate this general environment into all kinds of different functional sub-systems (see e.g. diagram 1, 1965:30), it is also clear that Easton thinks that this will overcomplicate his model (1976:441).

[41] Easton also treats support sometimes as a system variable or 'summary variable', i.e. not as a form of behaviour or attitude, but as an 'explanatory variable of stress' at the level of the system (157). This means, for example, that the *absence* of stress is an indicator of support.

feelings of value-rational duty. Only in second instance does political support denote subjective 'evaluative attitudes' of actors.[42]

When the political system tries to alleviate stress and increase support through political actions, this foremost means it tries to satisfy either demands or wants in order to prevent future demands (1965:402). In other words, Easton assumes that as long as citizens are satisfied they will accept the decisions of the political system. From a behavioural point of view, this does not necessarily mean that they have a favourable attitude towards it, but rather that the utility of political action or even resistance is too low in comparison to other goals in life. Just as for Dahl, political apathy does not necessarily signal content, but is "an indication that the politically relevant groups have not moved beyond the point of indifference" (1965:224).

Nevertheless, political actions, according to Easton, may also encourage a more stable subjective evaluative support. Easton famously separates between two fundamentally different forms of political evaluation. *Diffuse support* explains why political support is relatively independent of political output and demand satisfaction, while *specific support* explains how authorities can organise and accrue support through their specific actions and outputs. However, Easton has great difficulty of clearly formulating the differences between the two – a difficulty that is, in my opinion, the core problem of his work. Easton appeals to our political intuition that political discontent sometimes leads to fundamental political change while sometimes it does not (1975:436). What we would like to know, however, is how such intuition translates into careful analytical concepts.

When we run through Easton's work it seems that the differentiation between specific and diffuse support is based upon different *sources* of political evaluation and the fact that different forms of system stress are addressed, i.e. they have a different *function*.[43] Diffuse support concerns the evaluation of the political system as an *object-in-itself* – the 'being' of the system quite separately from output effectiveness – while specific support, concerns evaluation of the system as a *means* in terms of its output effectiveness. Subsequently, as already stated, if specific support addresses stress caused by political dissatisfaction diffuse support is relatively autonomous of output and can address stress caused by social conflict. Or, related to the core definition of political life, specific support concerns *satisfaction* with the allocated values, while diffuse support concerns the *authoritative* part of this allocation.

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[42] Easton labels these two types of support 'overt' and 'covert' support perceived in terms of a dimension running from dysfunctional to functional behaviour and from attitudes of 'deepest hostility' to 'blind faith' respectively (1965:159, 163-4). It does seem that in his later work Easton de-emphasised the functional (overt) understanding of support (1975;1976).

[43] Many have separated specific and diffuse support based on the idea that the former is evaluative and the latter is about attachment (see e.g. Dalton 1999; 2004). Although this certainly has its merits, it denies Easton's claim that "the key attitude associated with support would be of an evaluative sort" (Easton 1975:436).

When Easton argues that political output-effectiveness can explain political legitimacy, this means in Easton's model that specific instrumental support can 'spill-over' into value-rational support for politics as legitimate domination. In what follows, I will show that Easton's analysis ultimately cannot justify such spill-over while simultaneously upholding strict analytical boundaries between specific and diffuse support. However, even if Easton's explanation fails, it seems to me that he does provide us with a different insight into the relation between effectiveness and legitimacy, between strategic-interests and normativity.

4.4.4 Specific Support: Satisfaction of Symbolic Interests or Symbolic Satisfaction?

Specific support, Easton argues, is about the "connection between wants or demands and the activities of the authorities" (1965:267).[44] Or, as Easton briefly puts it, specific support can be constructed as an "index of political contentment", which is the "ratio between outputs and demands" (1965:406). However, and importantly, specific support appeals to interests and not directly to demands. Specific support concerns a "*quid pro quo*" exchange relation and "the favourable attitudes that stem from offering the members of a system some felt or perceived returns and that accordingly appeal to their sense of self-interest" (1965:343). In short, if citizens perceive that they 'benefit' from political outputs "they can be expected to offer support" to the political authorities (1965:382).

Put in these terms, it is clear that the concept of 'demand' is no longer an intrinsic part of the definition of specific support. Indeed, Easton later clearly acknowledges that "[t]he uniqueness of specific support lies in its relationship to the satisfactions that the members of a system feel they obtain from the perceived outputs and performances of the political authorities" (1975:437). Indeed, when Easton talks about evaluating political output he explicitly means the evaluation of the *actions of authorities* (1975:438). Specific support, it seems, is foremost about output satisfaction, and its relation with demands is only derivative. From this we can conclude that citizens are not expected to be politically active, but that political satisfaction or specific support concerns the relation between *active* authorities and a *passive* audience evaluating these actors. In short, specific support is not guaranteed in what we have called the *political game*, but rather in the *political theatre*.

Given the allocative and conflictive nature of politics it is of course unlikely that every political output (action) is evaluated favourably. Easton therefore argues that to generate specific support it is important "to satisfy some of the members ... some of the time" (1965:409,231). Specific support, then, includes "satisfaction with outputs on the average" or "perceived *general* performance" (1976:436; 1975:438, my emphasis). In Easton's account, then, we can see that

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[44] Interestingly, Easton formerly called specific support, akin to Parsons, 'contingent support', clearly expressing its more contingent and conditional character (footnote 2, 1965:268).

specific support entails a *generalising* mechanism which makes it already relatively independent of specific output. But specific support not only generalises in the time-dimension (average), but also in terms of content, the material-dimension. As Easton acknowledges, it is fairly difficult to evaluate the performance of authorities in terms interests and preferences (1975:439). The causal relation between their actions and between the final result – the difference between output and outcome – is difficult to perceive in a complex society even for a 'professional social scientist' (1975:439). As such, it seems to me, evaluations are often based upon *symbolic shortcuts* or heuristics. So, for example, the support for authorities might be linked to the state of the economy expressed in symbolic figures like the BNP or unemployment rates. On the other hand, symbolic shortcuts might also concern mediated public opinion or the opinion of public intellectuals. Easton seems to acknowledge this when he claims that what counts as successful political output is a function of 'cultural expectations' in the first place (404-6).

The point is that these generalising tendencies explain that specific support no longer concerns the evaluation of authorities in terms of specific output or in terms of direct personal experience, knowledge or interests. Specific support, we must acknowledge, is already quite diffuse. It cannot simply be reduced to interest satisfaction through political action. The political authorities must foremost be '*perceived*' as satisfying interests (1975:439). Given the emphasis on perception and given the fact that the most stressful and important demands concern *salient issues*, it seems, that specific support does not depend upon the evaluation of all political output – implying some kind of utilitarian bookkeeping model – but upon the evaluation of particular salient issues that are symbolic of effective performance. In other words, what seems to matter the most is the satisfaction of *symbolic interests*, i.e. interests that are symbolic of government effectiveness.

A further complexity concerns the fact that political demands not only concern preferences and interests, but also *expectations* of what authorities ought to do. As such, I might unfavourably evaluate the authorities not because they hurt my interests, but because they failed to live up to my expectations. It can be argued that satisfaction, different from utility, inherently entails subjective expectations and that evaluation is often related to perceptions of decline or progress.[45] When satisfaction also concerns expectations it seems that I might evaluate a political leader positively because I *expect* him to address certain issues. If anything, this is the basis of support mobilisation by political leaders and parties (1957:396). Political leaders mobilise support and loyalty by *committing*

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[45] Easton seems to recognise this relation between satisfaction and expectations as he claims that specific support not only arises from 'direct' interest satisfaction, but also from "the patterns of outputs as they emerge over time" that "generate the feeling of being well governed" (1975:441).

themselves to a cause or demand in *exchange* for 'loyalty' from his supporters (1965:205,216,226).[46] Specific support, we might say, concerns a contractual relation between supporters and the political leader. As such, specific support is not about an evaluation of *effective results*, but of political actions that show the leader's *commitment to results*. Output satisfaction, we can conclude, is *symbolic* of the implicit contractual relation between leader and followers not about the actual fulfilment of preferences or interests. Indeed, Easton clearly acknowledges this type of '*symbolic satisfaction*' (1975:447).[47]

Easton's understanding of specific support, then, is already quite complicated. Any simple relations between support and interest satisfaction must immediately be qualified. Not only is such satisfaction already quite generalised or diffuse as it concerns the *satisfaction of symbolic interests*, specific support also seems to entail contractual expectations, which provide the possibility of a *symbolic satisfaction of interests*. Although the difference between the two is analytically clear, we might wonder whether this distinction can reasonably be drawn at all in practice as symbolic interest satisfaction often includes notions of expectations.[48]

4.4.5 Diffuse Support: Legitimacy and Trust

Diffuse support, in Easton's framework, explains why people accept binding political decisions despite political or social conflict, despite political dissatisfaction and despite the fact that the decision may be contrary to their interests. In contrast to specific support, diffuse support is 'unconditional', which means it is 'independent of output' (1965:273). In short, Easton understands diffuse support foremost in terms of a Weberian kind of subjective belief in legitimate domination – "the strong bonds of loyalty to the objects of a system as ends in themselves" (1965:273).[49] However, in his early work Easton additionally distinguishes between 'structural' and 'ideological' legitimacy (1965:286)[50], while in his later work he distinguishes diffuse support between political legitimacy and

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[46] Despite Easton's criticism of Parsons, he seems to take over Parsons' general idea of 'leadership support' (1976:432).

[47] Other concepts in Easton's theory that denote the same mechanism include: 'symbolic stimulation' (1965:354), 'symbolic gratification' (1065:390), and 'symbolic political behaviour' (1965:442).

[48] The differentiation is akin to Edelman's distinction between 'referential' and 'condensation' symbols (Edelman 1985 [1964]:6). But also Edelman later doubted whether "there are any referential symbols" as "anything that serves as a symbol is bound to condense a range of ideas, feelings and sentiments" (1985:198).

[49] Easton criticises Weber on several accounts but these critiques, it seems to me, are mostly unfounded (1965:281,301-2).

[50] It must be admitted his earlier work is more complex as Easton distinguishes between different kinds of diffuse support: legitimacy, the ideology of the common interest and identification with the political community, while legitimacy in itself is divided between ideological principles, structural attachment and personal devotions (1965:286). It can be shown that this framework fundamentally confuses objects and sources of legitimacy. But we might interpret Easton's later work as admitting that the framework was not very clarifying. However, it does have consequences for all those Easton inspired researches that constantly

trust (1975:453). Although it would be wrong to claim that these two distinctions are identical, they do seem to connote the same essence: legitimacy or structural legitimacy seems to connote an *unconditional* value-rational belief in the validity of the political system, while trust or ideological legitimacy seems to connote a *conditional* value-rational belief in political validity.

Legitimacy or structural legitimacy, for Easton, connotes "the presence of an ingrained belief, usually transmitted across the generations in the socialization process" (1965:208). This kind of structural legitimacy differs from ideological legitimacy because of this traditional and socialised origin. And especially "rituals, ceremonies, and physical representations ... serve to bolster an aura of sanctity, respect, and reverence for the existing political institutions" (1965:308-9). Ideological legitimacy, on the other hand, points to ideological values and goals inherent in a political regime.[51] These values are 'articulated' as a "set of ideals, ends, and purposes" (1965:290). Crucial for ideological legitimacy, according to Easton, is "whether *the outputs of the system* are perceived to be consistent and harmonious with the expectations roused by the ideological promises and commitments" (1965:294, my emphasis). In my view, this means that, first, ideological legitimacy is *conditional* upon outputs and, second, that concepts such as expectation, promise and commitment, also seems to connote an underlying *contract*. Indeed, concerning the first point, Easton states that ideologies "provide a context within which the authorities as well as the political structure and related norms may themselves be *tested* for their legitimacy" (1965:289, my emphasis). Concerning the second point, Easton explicitly hints at the 'basic truths' of social contract theories (1965:318).[52] The most important form of legitimating ideology, according to Easton, is the belief in the common good: "the conviction that there is a general good, that it can be determined or defined, ... and that the authorities ... ought to pursue and promote this general good" (1965:312).

This conditional kind of legitimacy means that political authorities are believed to be legitimate because people *expect* them to effectuate, and *belief* them to be committed to, the common good, which inherently means that political output is accepted – sometimes contrary to subjective interests (316) – as an *expression* of that common good. When Easton later emphasised political trust as a separate dimension of diffuse support, it seems that we should understand trust especially in terms of this social contract relation. Political trust, according to Easton, means "that members would feel that their own interests would be attended to even if the authorities were exposed to little supervision or scrutiny" (1975:447). In other words, the members feel that the authorities are committed to their, but especially, the common interests (1975:448). Political trust, it

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draw the same conclusion: the citizen is critical or dissatisfied with politics but supports the ideal values of democracy (Dalton 1999; 2004; Norris 1999; Klingeman 1999; Crozier 1975).

[51] Easton separates these regime ideologies from 'partisan ideologies' (1965:292).

[52] Easton criticises Weber for ignoring principles of 'social contract' that "have served as central validating principles in the history of Western political thought" (1965:301-2).

seems to me, points to underlying contractual expectations and, as Easton clearly states, "such trust would reveal itself as *symbolic satisfaction* with the processes by which the country is run" (1975:447, my emphasis). In short, it is not about the satisfaction of interests per se, but about the satisfaction of contractual expectations.

The problem, then, is not that we disagree that contractual expectations mobilised by explicit promise or public commitment are both *normative* and *conditional*, the problem is rather that the analytical differentiation between specific and diffuse support seems to have collapsed.

4.4.6 Three Analytical Arenas: Game, Theatre and System

When Easton claims that political 'output failure' can explain a decline of *specific support* that eventually spills-over into a decline of *diffuse support*, then we are not surprised as the two kinds of support can hardly be separated at all. It is telling that when Easton provides examples of such output failure in post-war United States he mentions solely actions of authorities that breach people's expectations of what is right and proper – "outputs that affront human and legal norms" (1976:440). In short, Easton made specific support quite diffuse and on the other hand he made diffuse support quite conditional.

Easton therefore rightly wonders if it is possible to separate between diffuse and specific support at all (1975:448). When Easton answers affirmative, this is because he no longer tries to separate between the two upon the dimensions of conditional/unconditional, means/object or strategic/normative, but tries to rescue the analytical difference by separating between political *objects* of evaluation, between person and office (1975:449).[53] Although can we readily admit that expectations concerning office and person are not identical, it seems to me that this solution is unsatisfying, and above all uninteresting. Instead, Easton's analysis opens up to a different analytical possibility, which becomes clear if we hold on to our differentiation between the political game, theatre and, in addition, system understood as legitimate domination.

When Easton analyses the legitimacy of the political system in general he is, just as Weber, concerned with *unconditional* belief in the *normative* validity of legitimate domination. However, in Easton's more pluralist analysis of the political game – i.e. of resource-based political influence and backstage negotiations and bargaining – he is concerned with *conditional* support of the *strategic-rational* actors for the 'rules of the game', which depends upon how they evaluate the utility of this game over time. Just as in the pluralist model, we can say that to the extent that such negotiations

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[53] This also seems to be the solution of modern empirical research that uses Easton's model to measure the trust of different political objects. Dalton argues, for example, that specific support explains the rise and fall of political incumbents independent of the regime (2004:58). Norris claims a kind of continuum between specific- and diffuse-support that parallels the hierarchy of different objects (Norris 1999; see also Linde & Ekman:393).

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satisfy and fragment wants and interests of the general public, political stress or social conflict is alleviated. Specific support, in this instance, points especially to functional behaviour, political apathy and the "distribution of satisfactions" to reduce system stress (1965:407). Finally, in politics as theatre Easton analyses how politics mobilises *normative* expectations among a passive audience – either by specific politicians making public promises or by expectations already present in regime and office – and how these *conditional* expectations are symbolically satisfied.
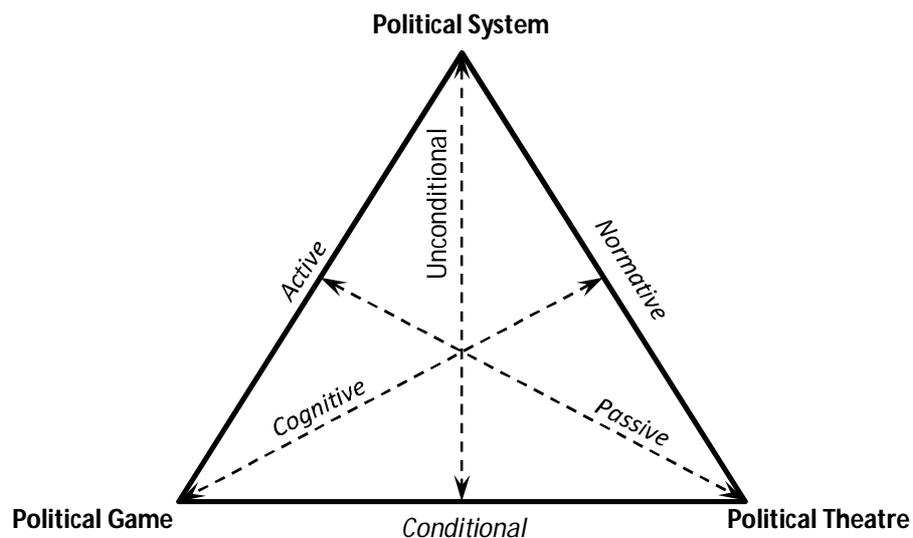

Fig.4.1 – The three political arenas in Easton's theory

This theatre model of politics becomes apparent when we take a closer look at Easton's understanding of political output. Political output is not just about effective 'performance' satisfying interests and demands, output is especially about *symbolic actions*, i.e. about 'statements'. "The importance of all statements", Easton writes, "derives from the fact that persons obtain some satisfaction from symbols" (1965:354). Political output, then, also includes statements expressing "rationales and commitments" that aim to "create a general sense of good will" (1965:353,465). Scharpf, who admits of being influenced by Easton's work, also seems to emphasise this side of political output.[54] Indeed, when Scharpf talks about 'output-legitimacy' in his empirical theory he often means 'output-oriented' legitimation by symbolic action, by argumentation, which emphasises the 'plebiscitary' basis of such legitimation (1970:75; 1997:28; 2006:4). Output-evaluation, then, is not about effectiveness, system performance or the actual result of political decisions, even if these

[54] Just as Easton, Scharpf understands the need for legitimation as a function of democratic 'viability' and 'survival' (2006:1;1997:22,29;1999:28-9). Legitimacy is understood as a *capability* of the political system.

are not unimportant, but about effective *symbolic actions* of politicians – it is not about interests satisfaction but about symbolic satisfaction (Scharpf 2006:3).

4.4.7 Conclusion: Conditional Legitimacy

Easton, it seems to me, opens up the possibility of understanding political legitimacy on different grounds. Intentionally or not, he opens a new analytical space between cognitive and conditional strategic action, on the one hand, and normative unconditional feelings of duty, on the other. Instead, the theatre model allows us to understand normative but conditional support for politics. Although we need to analyse this model further, we can already concede that such an understanding of conditional political legitimacy is inherently differing from Weber's unconditional beliefs. However, we might wonder the extent to which both Easton and Scharpf discarded the conflictive nature of politics in the meantime. Where Easton flirts with the 'ideology of the common good' he at least leaves open the question of whether a genuine consensus exists about the common good or that it merely connotes 'expectations' that politics ought to pursue the common good, whatever that may entail (1965:294,312). Scharpf, in contrast, claims that the 'social contract' actually entails a general and substantive consensus, which in Europe, he claims, concerns expectations about the welfare state (1999:122; 1970:24; 1997:28). This means that political conflict is solely perceived *vertically* and understood in terms of political dissatisfaction. It seems to me, however, that we can also explain political dissatisfaction without presuming some social consensus serving as a 'benchmark for legitimacy' (Scharpf 1970:24). We cannot discard the conflictive nature of politics at will and must be careful of cryptonormativism.

Secondly, the idea of a 'spill-over' between specific and diffuse support or a causal relation between political effectiveness and legitimacy remains problematic, to say the least. For sure, the three political arena's we distinguished are related. Political compromises must be symbolically legitimated and output-effectiveness is related to the salience of political issues which also relate to legitimation-needs. The relation between political output – symbolic or effective – and legitimate domination, on the other hand, remains difficult. We might readily agree with Lipset that this relation can be understood in terms of compensation or structural opportunity, but not in terms of causality. There seems to remain a divide between conditional strategic action and unconditional value-rationality that is not easily bridged.[55] It is precisely for this reason conditional normativity is so interesting. Unfortunately, contemporary discussions about output-legitimacy remain analytically

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[55] This does not mean, of course, that there might not be *psychological* mechanisms in which interests and values are intimately related. Also in Weber's work the need for *self-justification* might have a material basis. Indeed, Weber commented that the rich and powerful feel an inherent need to justify their fortune in face of social inequality (1978:953-4). As such, my argument here does not mean that we need to deny Marxist analyses of relations between political legitimacy and ruling-classes.

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too confused to really appreciate this point. The discussion might benefit from differentiating between the three political arenas[56] or, at least, by distinguishing more clearly between political output and political throughput – between preference satisfaction and symbolic satisfaction.[57]

4.5 Conclusion: Political Support and Dramaturgy

The three branches of democratic realism discussed, grapple in their own specific ways with Weber's legacy, a legacy that problematises democratic conflict, rationality and stability. Democratic realism in general, we might conclude, fails to come up with a different, analytically robust notion of political legitimacy. Worse, this tradition easily seems to slip into cryptonormativist claims – instead of realism it often remains quite normative. Many claims, especially concerning the relation between political effectiveness and political legitimacy, remain intuitive and poorly analysed. And, finally, where it concerns political legitimacy this tradition tends to let consensus in through the backdoor. It seems that democratic realists eagerly point out that politics is inherently conflictive, but deny the conflictive nature of *legitimate* politics – a tendency that delegitimates conflict and depoliticises legitimacy. Democratic realists tend to emphasise a strong dichotomy between interest conflict and value consensus that is not only empirically questionable, but which theoretically forces them in a quandary. Theories that perceive politics in terms of coordination or argumentation seem to be in a better position to overcome this sharp duality.

Despite these problematic tendencies – which continue up till today –democratic realism also provides us with interesting insights. Especially the pluralist branch provides democratic theory with much needed realism. Political influence is based upon unequal distributions of political resources and the political decision-making process is structured by this inequality. Political-decisions, then, are the result of power and conflicts between organised interests – results of the *political game.* At the same time, the tradition of democratic realism also provides some analysis of the symbolic nature of democratic politics. Political leaders and representatives not only mobilise interests and conflicts, they summon expectations by publically making promises or by committing

[56] Unfortunately, contemporary debate rather takes over Easton's analytical levels of political objects, which is understood as a 'hierarchy of stability' (Offe 1998:38). This hierarchy of stability must be understood in terms of a spill-over of social conflict and not of legitimacy. Social cleavages, it is claimed, can only be contained if both sides of the cleavage commit to the authorities, if not to the authorities then to the regime, and if not to the regime then at least to the political community (Easton 1965:320). In this sense, 'ascending' and 'descending' 'causal factors' of mutual confirmation exist between the different political objects (Offe 1998:38-9). While this idea is quite dominant in current empirical and theoretical research, there is no solid analytical basis for this kind of hierarchy of support, not even in Easton's own theory.

[57] Easton does identify what he calls 'withinputs' but these connote a different phenomenon: the idea that an "event occurring within a system may also have some share in influencing the nature of the outputs" (1965:31). These events especially concern demands that do not rise in the environment but are "internally generated" and "formed through experiences and activities in strictly political roles" (1965:55). Easton later acknowledged that his system theory is a "so-called black box model" (1990:ix).

to a cause, normative expectations that can subsequently be symbolically satisfied. In short, the dramaturgy of *political theatre* seems to open the possibility of a different kind of political legitimacy, the possibility of conditional normative political support. It is this latter claim that I want address in the final pages of this chapter.

The democratic realists perceive politics in instrumental terms which means that they emphasise political output and democratic politics as an effective process. Although it would be witless to argue that political output is irrelevant, it seems that especially Easton's analysis points out that such instrumental reading of the political process is not enough. We might perceive that politics not only has instrumental but also *expressive* functions (Luhmann 1983:223ff.; Edelman 1985:2, 1988:10). The reason, furthermore, that we can analytically separate between these two functions or perspectives is because of the *time* dimension. If a politician commits himself in the present to a goal he will realise in the future, it is clear that we cannot equal the present *symbolic action* of promise with the *binding decision* or *outcome* in the future.

A dramaturgical analysis emphasises symbolic actions over the actual output or outcome of a political process. Politics is most of the time not about taking final and binding decisions, let alone about the outcome of such decisions, politics most of the time is about mediatised political talk and events – about symbols. This does not mean that output does not matter, but that because utility or interest satisfaction lies in the indeterminate future, it is expressive action that gives meaning to the immediate present (Luhmann 1983:226). Expressive and instrumental political actions, then, are not only different because they are distinguished in time, but also because as a consequence they have a different *meaning*. Indeed, when we have analytically separated between the political game and the political theatre, we are actually arguing that the instrumental and expressive functions of the democratic process are *differentiated* (Luhmann 1983:228; Edelman 2001:19-20). Dramaturgical analysis, in any case, holds that there exists no necessary 'harmony' or symmetry between the instrumental and expressive functions of politics (Luhmann 1983:227). Symbolic action or political theatre is relatively independent of actual outcome – relatively independent from the actual results of the political process on the conditions of everyday life. Not only does politically effective output lie in the indeterminate future, as stated before, we often also do not have a clue how political decisions play out in reality. Outputs need interpretation.

Dramaturgical legitimation, it seems to me, concerns both the dramaturgical arousal of normative expectations about future political actions and outputs as well as the symbolic satisfaction of these expectations. The key, then, is that both normative expectations and fulfilments are produced by symbolic actions, not by 'real' output (Edelman 1988:106). The political process, we

might follow Luhmann, is therefore *self-legitimating* to the extent that the process can proof its own validity, i.e. it can answer the questions it raises itself (1983:252-3). A different way to understand this type of legitimacy, which I would like to label *political support*, is to emphasise the mobilisation mechanism that is so important in the tradition of democratic realists. The political leader, it is claimed, tries to mobilise support by committing himself to some goal or interest he wants to realise in the future. To the extent that the supporter strategically agrees with this goal – it is in his interest – he also commits to the political leader, either by vote, acclamation or by internal attachment, emotional identification or, in general, by support or loyalty.[58] Furthermore, the supporter in exchange for his loyalty now has normative expectations of what the political leader ought to do. From a dramaturgical perspective we might define political support or loyalty as the *constant suspension of judgment*. By use of symbolic actions, by dramaturgy, the leader tries to continuously postpone into the future the ultimate strategic and utilitarian judgment of whether support was worth it – the cost-benefit analysis. Dramaturgy is the constant "reconstruction of the past and its evocation of unobservables in the present and of potentialities in the future" (Edelman 1988:108). In short, the utilitarian evaluation and day of reckoning never comes as long as the political process is kept open (Luhmann 1983:38, 51-3).

Time and the 'indeterminacy' it implies, without exaggeration, is the core concept of this kind of political legitimacy, of political support (Luhmann 1983:116). It is telling that time is not a crucial concept in Weber's analysis of legitimacy (see also Luhmann 1983:226).[59] In contrast to Weber, we might therefore explain why support is neither about conditional strategic interests (utility) nor unconditional belief in validity (truth). Time allows us to perceive political legitimacy as conditional normativity. It is conditional upon future interests, but not upon their actual realisation or satisfaction. Rather it is conditional upon the capacity of the political process to continuously symbolically raise and satisfy normative expectations – upon its dramaturgical force. It is this force we need to understand.

A dramaturgical perspective lends its analytical power from a direct analogy to theatre. In theatre there is, in general, a clear differentiation between the actors performing a play and the audience watching the play. This differentiation between actors and audience is essential for a dramaturgical perspective. The actors perform a play through active use of all kinds of symbols – ranging from scene to clothes, to gestures, tone, style and image and, especially, to language. The audience, on

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[58] Luhmann uses the concept of 'credit' instead of support or loyalty (1983:47).

[59] It is not true, of course, that Weber was not aware of the importance of time especially where it concerns the ideology of progress in modernity (Weber 2004:13). However, when it comes to his analysis of political legitimacy, time hardly pays a role.

the other hand, is passive, i.e. spectators are not part of the play, even if they are part of the theatrical setting. The audience, furthermore, does not see actors performing, they see roles and characters, they see a meaningful story unfolding. They do not see the cardboard props and the bare stage, they see a castle, a battlefield or a dungeon. In short, a theatrical performance opens up a meaningful reality that is disconnected from 'real' life – it is a symbolic reality. The performance, furthermore, draws the audience into this meaningful symbolic world to the extent that the audience can *identify* with the story and the actors are competent (Luhmann 1983:224). The audience gets caught up in the unfolding narrative, in its plots and turns. The passive audience, to this extent, co-experiences (*miterleben*) crises and defeats, challenges and solutions, threats and hopes, conflict and harmony, enmity and friendship, heroism and cowardice, fear and love – in general, it experiences the *drama* of anxiety and reassurance (Luhmann 1983:195; Edelman 1988:123). The audience, then, might be passive but it is also 'drawn into the story'. We might therefore speak of a kind of '*uninvolved involvement*' (Luhmann 1983:123). Importantly, despite the symbolic nature of the play, the audience experiences real emotions, excitements and opinions. The people in the audience experience real meaning, it seems, because they either recognises themselves – their own life-experiences – in the symbolic play performed or the play shows them how life could be. As Jameson argues, symbols rouse real meaning either by *sentiment* or by *utopia* (1979:142, 1982:153). Importantly, this implies that people in the audience do not necessarily experience similar meaning – there is no consensus implied. Furthermore, the dramaturgical force does not depend merely upon positive sentiment or hopeful utopias, to the contrary, it often depends upon summoning aversions or fearful dystopias. A final characteristics of an audience is that it shows appreciation by applauding or booing. However, in a theatre the applause at the end of the performance when the script reached its conclusion and the curtains come down, if it is not mere ritual, usually concerns the appreciations of the actual actors, not of their characters. More interesting for us, however, is the cheering and booing we do when we lose ourselves in the narrative itself. When we hail the hero and jeer the villain.

A dramaturgical analysis of politics tries to analyse how a political process is able to sustain the same dramaturgical pre-conditions as can be found in theatre.[60] Politics, then, is first and foremost about performing dramatic stories which rouse anxieties and reassurances before an audience. "Politics", Edelman argues, "is a spectator sport" (1985:81). The symbolic narratives must mobilise real meaning by arousing sentiments and offering utopias so as to draw the public into

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[60] The importance of 'drama' and 'theatre' in politics has, obviously, occupied more scholars, see, e.g. Luhmann 1983; Edelman 1960, 1985, 1985a, 1988, 1993, 1998, 2001; Bennett & Edelman 1985; Burke 1941, 1951, 1963; Manin 1997; de Beus 2001; Hajer 2005a, 2005b; Schechner 1973; Goffman 1959, 1974; Geertz 1980.

politics. To this extent, politics has to be *entertainment* in order to avoid that the public stands outside politics, i.e. to avoid that the public perceives the cardboard stage (Luhmann 1983:196). To assure the public's involvement politics is *dramatised* – for example by romanticising the political vocation, highlighting the importance of leadership, by personalising politics, by scandal, conflict and competition, or by arousing fear and hope. At the same time, this dramatization of politics only holds to the extent that the public – the audience – does not get too involved. The people must remain in a state of uninvolved involvement. But precisely to the extent that political 'spectacle' opens up a symbolic reality over and beyond the worries and drags of everyday life the passivity of the audience is guaranteed (Edelman 1985:9). Politics as theatre, then, must simultaneously uphold this disconnection from 'reality' and assure a connection to 'real' emotions and fears. This, for sure, is not a simple accomplishment as can be seen when politics has to deal with too concrete issues, as for example in NIMBY-cases (Luhmann 1983:102). Finally, this kind of analysis tries to understand how through dramatization, the political process organises its own support by *acclamation*.

Dramaturgical analysis, described as such, seems almost inherently to be inclined to *functionalist* and *critical* analyses. Functionalism, it seems, is almost inevitable to the extent that without it politics as theatre is difficult to perceive. As long as analysis remains connected to subjective action orientations there is nothing intrinsically wrong with functionalism. So, for example, we must make clear why the political parties or interest organisations are motivated to dramatise their actions or the actions of their opponents. Something that might be explained by the fact that many issues compete for public attention and that the 'attention-span' of the audience is fairly limited (Downs 1972; Edelman 1988:28ff.). Drama, for sure, sells. We can even agree with Luhmann that the use of drama has the function to decrease social complexity and to absorb political conflict (1983:39,171). This means that we might understand political theatre as a necessary result of social conflict and interest plurality.

We need to be more careful, however, if we combine functionalism and critical analysis to avoid making broad sweeping claims. Habermas, for example, claims that 'diffuse mass loyalty' in 'advanced capitalism' rests upon acclamation and consumption (1975:36-7; also Offe 1984:60). As long as the system is able to guarantee 'civil privatism' by providing the masses with leisure, consumption goods and career opportunities, he claims, the system remains legitimated (1975:75). Such claims, however, are analytically fairly poor, confusing stability and legitimacy or expressive and instrumental functions of politics. We can, of course, be critical of the political theatre. Dramaturgical analysis can provide the basis for neo-Marxist analyses in which drama is perceived as a kind of 'fetishism' 'mystifying' social inequalities (Edelman 1988:11, 1985:2). Politics, we readily admit, often concerns the creation of 'pseudo-events' and 'non-issues' (Edelman 1988:34, 2001:66).

One can also be critical of the fact that what attracts political and public attention is not a function of the severity of a problem, as pluralism wants us to belief, but rather of its dramatic appeal (Downs 1972; Edelman 1988:28). Finally, we can also critically analyse how political drama is a *depoliticising* force, i.e. how it keeps the public passive or 'docile', why the public accepts the differentiation of political labour or how politics distracts attention form the concrete to 'remote and the symbolic' (Edelman 1988:98, 1985:117; Luhmann 1983:116-8,121-2,195).

However, we need to be cautious. Recognising the dramaturgical force of politics – and its importance for legitimation – does not mean that sinister elites are capable of manufacturing the emotions and interests of the malleable mass at will. First of all, we have already discussed that symbols must remain connected to real experiences (Edelman 1988:8). Politics is not merely a 'text' that no longer needs to connect to real life, as Edelman sometimes seems to imply (1988:36, 2001:6). As such, there are certain boundaries upon the flexibility of political dramaturgy – not everything is possible. Second, as Luhmann rightly points out, political drama not only decreases complexity for the passive audience, but also for the political actors (1983:40). They are also 'drawn-in' to the dramatic narrative, from which they cannot step out at will as 'the scene carries itself' (Luhmann 1983:39). They are committed to the story they perform through their own symbolic actions and 'presentation of self' (Luhmann 1983:47; Goffman 1959). I will address both issues further in chapter 8, but we should at least concede, in my opinion, that both postmodern fantasies that everything is possible as well as elitist theories that testify of the omnipotence of elites must be qualified. This also means that we should be careful about drawing strong boundaries between 'real' and 'deceptive' politics, between the political game and political theatre. If anything, political theatre *is* real politics (Edelman 1988:104).

The final question we need to address is how we should understand political support as a form of political legitimacy. We usually do not say that a play performed in theatre generates legitimacy. The main difference between theatre and politics concerns the fact that politics *also* has an instrumental function. The specific dramaturgical qualities of politics relate to the fact that we do expect politics to 'determine' the future - that politics *does matter* for future conditions and interest satisfaction. Without the instrumental function expressive political actions seem to lose their specific dramatic force. To this extent, the contractual notions in the theories of Easton and Scharpf do make sense. Political support means that we normatively agree in the present that politics ought to realise an interest in the future. However, such contractual perspective often seems to connote some underlying social consensus – which is not necessary at all in a dramaturgical perspective. Furthermore, a contract seems to emphasise future output, while normative support is especially

guaranteed in the present. A dramaturgical perspective explains how normative expectations are aroused and symbolically satisfied or confirmed quite independent from political output. The fact that expressive symbolic actions are about 'immediate satisfaction' (Luhmann 1983:225) also means, in my opinion, that dramaturgy must not be understood in terms of *trust*. I will discuss the normative dimensions of trust in chapter 6, but we might agree that trust concerns both *uncertainty* and risk-taking *actions*. In contrast, dramaturgical political support concerns the certainty of immediate emotions and is not about action as the public remains passive, i.e. without "immediate action commitments" (Luhmann 1983:194). This latter fact of passivity, finally, also means that dramaturgy must not be confused with political argumentation, which we will discuss in chapter 7 and 8. Finally, we already discussed that support is also not about legitimate domination because the time perspective allows us to understand normativity between conditional interests and unconditional validity (truth).

Political support, then, is not about contract, trust, argumentation or domination, but, in my opinion, it is about a continuous arousal and satisfaction of normative expectations through dramaturgical actions. As such, political support is about *subjective normativity* and therefore, it seems to me, is a form of political legitimacy. However, the object of this normativity is less definite. Support might be directed to 'particular actors or political parties', but it might also concern the 'political drama' in its totality – its 'history' (Luhmann 1983:194-5). Political support, it seems to me, is fairly dynamic, fluid, diffuse and fragmented. It is inherently caught up in multiple and on-going political narratives. This means that this kind of political legitimacy might not so much explain subjective duties to obey, but it does consist of normative support for political actions and actors, however fluctuating.

Even more importantly, this kind of legitimacy is highly tolerant of *political conflict*. Narratives are often ambiguous, abstract and not necessarily coherent, which means that symbols can have multiple meanings and cater different interests (Edelman 1988:71, 2001:96; Luhmann 1983:116,195). This means for Luhmann that drama both reduces complexity and simultaneously preserves complexity (1983:112). Furthermore, the self-legitimating character of politics as theatre does not, of course, mean that expectations are never disappointed. They often are. But especially the expressive function of politics might explain how such disappointments can be 'absorbed'. Disappointed expectation can be dealt with, for example, by the displacement of political leaders, the dramaturgical satisfaction of the fall of the mighty, the appointment of responsibility, blame and punishment, therapeutic repentance by leaders, by isolating the failure as an unique affair or, obviously, by emphasising 'plausible explanations'. That is, expectations can be transformed through learning and 'relearning' processes (Luhmann 1983:235). Indeed, political support can be

understood as the ability to process disappointment (Luhmann 1983:119). To this extent, political disappointment and dissatisfaction does not deny political legitimacy, but rather provides new dramatic sources of normative expectations. As long as the people remain 'involved', as long as politics is entertaining and as long as people do not withdraw from politics all together, disappointment is part of the dramaturgical legitimation process. Furthermore, as long as the narrative remains open-ended it always remains open for different plots and turns. Postponing the final decision absorbs conflict (Luhmann 1983:102). Finally, social and political conflict has specific strong dramatic qualities. The friend/enemy opposition is not only expressive of shared interests and identities, but also the basis upon which fear and anxiety is mobilised (Edelman 1988:66, 2001:7). Cheering for the protagonists and booing the antagonist is the essence of political dramaturgy.

In conclusion, when the democratic realists emphasise the importance of political effectiveness their analyses of political legitimacy remain caught in the separation between unconditional beliefs and conditional strategic interests. When, however, we introduce the concept of time this enables us to distinguish between the instrumental and expressive functions of the political process. Finally, this expressive function not only allows a dramaturgical analysis of politics, but also to understand political legitimacy in terms of conditional subjective normative support without denying the conflictive nature of legitimate politics.