

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Political domination can be found, to varying degrees, in many of the social relationships of all societies, past and present. Properly understood, it is a great evil which ought to be minimized in the best interest of justice. As such, one would expect political domination to be a topic of great concern and frequent discussion in political and social theory. In one respect, at any rate, this expectation is duly satisfied, for the word “domination” appears often in the contemporary writings of social and political theorists, and many situations or states of affairs are described as involving domination. For example:

The institution of slavery, wherever and whenever it has appeared, has been described as a form of domination.

Regimes of systematic discrimination against minority groups — as for example those regimes certainly in the past, and to some extent perhaps today, disadvantaging European Jews, African Americans in the United States, and homosexuals nearly everywhere — have been described as forms of domination.

Despotic, totalitarian, and colonial political regimes have all, at various times, been described as forms of domination.

Modes of production — feudal, capitalist, and so forth — have been described as forms of domination, as have more narrowly defined systems of economic organization (e.g., unregulated wage-labor in the nineteenth century).

Institutional structures, such as the criminal incarceration or mental health systems — especially in the form these institutions have taken over the past century or two in the West — have been described as forms of domination.

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Many intra-familial relations, particularly when abusive, have been described as forms of domination.

... and so on, almost without end.¹ At present, I do not mean to imply any or all of these examples constitute genuine instances of political domination (my position on each of these particulars will become clear in due course); rather, I mean only to suggest the wide range of situations to which the concept has been applied.

Given this nearly ubiquitous usage, it stands to reason that many political and social theorists should have attempted a general analysis of the phenomenon as such — much as has been done with regards to, for example, power, equality, freedom, and other basic concepts. In this second respect, however, one's expectations are generally disappointed: general accounts of domination are few and far between. Even among those few that do exist, many are brief, ad hoc, restricted to one or another aspect or application of the phenomenon, hopelessly vague, or some combination of these. This lacuna, in my view, is striking — though perhaps, as we shall see below, understandable.

§ 1. THE PROJECT

In response to this situation, I aim in this work to develop a *general theory of political domination* that on the one hand makes reasonably coherent sense of the many diverse applications of the concept 'domination' to real world situations, while on the other hand remains specific and precise enough to usefully serve in broader arguments of normative political theory or political philosophy. To state the conclusion up front, I will argue that political domination should be understood as a condition suffered by persons or groups

¹ Many specific examples of each could easily, if tediously, be cited; this will only be done in the course of discussion insofar as it is appropriate and useful.

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whenever they are dependent on a social relationship in which some other person or group wields arbitrary powers over them; and, furthermore, that it should be regarded as an injustice to suffer under this condition and therefore, as a matter of justice, political domination should be minimized in any society. Nearly every aspect of this statement stands in need of further elaboration and explanation, but at this juncture I will only highlight a few general issues concerning the nature of the project as such.

First, I describe my project as the development of a theory of *political* domination in order to alert the reader to the fact that not every possible meaningful use of the word ‘domination’ will be covered by the theory. Exactly which uses are covered and which are not will only become clear as the discussion develops, but the examples cited above should provide a rough guide as to the particular sense of ‘domination’ this work will primarily focus on. The word ‘political’ is used here only as a term of art, of course: I do not mean to exclude any potential examples of domination by insisting that they be ‘political’ in some substantive sense. The content of this term remains to be filled in by the theory itself. In the meantime, however, this may lead to some unfortunately awkward language — as, for example, when I refer to abusive familial relationships as a possible example of political domination.²

Second, I describe my project as the development of a *theory* of political domination, and not merely a conception of the phenomenon. A theory of political domination includes a conception of what it is descriptively, but in addition to this offers an account of how we should evaluate any actual instances of the phenomenon — why we should

² Of course, this particular example will only seem awkward to those readers who view the present division of public and private spheres as natural, or at least non-political. If on the contrary, one regards (correctly in my view) the division itself as political, this language should not seem awkward at all. For further discussion on this point, see chapter eight, sect. 50.

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care about them, what we should do about them, and so forth. In other words, by a theory of political domination, I mean a *normative* theory in moral or practical philosophy.

What would constitute a successful theory of political domination? In my view, a project of this sort ought to be assessed according to three basic criteria.

First, a successful theory of political domination should be a *general* theory. By this I mean its application should not be limited to this or that particular case or set of cases, but rather should be “open” in the sense that it would enable us to say of new, unanticipated situations whether or not they count as instances of political domination, and if so what we should do about them. Thus a theory about, say, nineteenth century European colonial domination, while perhaps interesting (or not) on its own terms, would fail to be a general theory in the required sense.

Second, the theory should be both descriptively and practically *useful*. A descriptively useful theory would be capable of discriminating among real-world situations according to the level or degree of political domination — it would be “descriptively contoured,” one might say.³ A practically useful theory would set normative standards for political action that are neither impossible or unattainable on the one hand, nor too easily achieved on the other. (By way of example, a theory maintaining political domination is both everywhere and inescapable would fail to be useful on both counts.) A practically useful theory must also satisfy a condition called the *separation thesis*; later in this chapter I will explain what this entails.

And third, the theory should sit reasonably well with our relevant pre-existing intuitions. It is not necessary that the theory vindicate all of our intuitions exactly as they

³ For the idea of a “contoured” theory, I am indebted to Millgram, “What’s the Use of Utility?” (2000).

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are (and in any case, people's intuitions differ), but it must respect them at least to the extent that the theory is recognizably a theory of political domination and not something else. For example, a theory that did not include slavery as an instance of domination would clearly, it seems to me, be an unsuccessful theory. In other words, we are looking for something along the lines of what John Rawls calls a "reflective equilibrium": the idea here is roughly that our intuitions retained after due consideration and reflection should match the theory and vice versa.⁴

At various stages in the discussion that follows, I will of course elaborate on each of these criteria as needed.

Some readers may want to know whether the theory developed here purports to be universally applicable to any society in any historical period. My response depends on what one means by a "universal" theory. As I explain later in the introduction, it is not my view that theories of political and social phenomena are natural artifacts, waiting to be discovered through diligent and careful research. Thus, I would not claim my theory of political domination is "objectively true" in the sense that many people believe, say, the law of gravity is objectively true. If this is what one means by a universal theory, then I would not claim my theory is universal. There is another sense, however, in which a theory might be regarded universal: namely, if it could be usefully put to work in the study of diverse societies in diverse historical periods. Thus, for example, Amartya Sen has been working on a theory in which poverty is understood as lacking the basic capabilities to function in one's local culture. Hypothetically, at any rate, we should be able to employ this conception of poverty to any society in any historical period once we

⁴ See Rawls, "Outline of a Decision Procedure for Ethics" (1951); *Theory of Justice* (1971), § 9: p. 46–53.

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have filled in the variable substantive content of ‘basic capabilities’ case by case.⁵ In this restricted sense, then, I would like to claim my theory of political domination is potentially universal, but individual readers are free to judge for themselves.⁶

Before further discussing my approach to the study of political domination, let me explain the roundabout path by which I came to be interested in the problem. This will be useful, I hope, both in providing a context for the present study, and also in suggesting a reason one might find it valuable.

§ 2. BACKGROUND: THE REPUBLICAN REVIVAL

In the past few decades, there has been a remarkable resurgence of interest in the political theory of republicanism. This new republicanism came in two waves: an earlier, “civic humanist” wave, commonly associated with Hannah Arendt, Gordon Wood, J. G. A. Pocock, and others; and a latter “civic republican” wave, commonly associated with Quentin Skinner, Maurizio Viroli, and Philip Pettit.⁷ Both of these groups lay claim to a

⁵ Sen, “Poor, Relatively Speaking” (1983), and *Inequality Reexamined* (1992), p. 115–116, drawing on a passage in Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* (1776), V.2.2: p. ii.399–400. I am indebted to Pettit, op cit. (1997), p. 158, for pointing out this idea and its relevance here.

⁶ Generality and universality are not exactly the same thing, because a general theory may be open to new cases only within a restricted range of cultural or historical contexts. Universality is thus much stronger than generality, and accordingly I do not believe a theory of political domination must be universal in order to be judged successful.

⁷ This useful distinction between civic humanism and civic republicanism, I borrow from Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (1993), p. 205–206. For civic humanist literature, see chapter seven, sect. 43(b), where it is discussed in more detail. For civic republican literature, see especially: Skinner, *Machiavelli* (1981), “The Idea of Negative Liberty” (1984), “The Paradoxes of Political Liberty” (1986); “The Republican Ideal of Political Liberty” (1990), and *Liberty Before Liberalism* (1998); Viroli, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Well-Ordered Society* (1988), and *Machiavelli* (1998); Sunstein, “Beyond the Republican Revival” (1988); Pettit, “The Freedom of the City” (1989), “Freedom as Antipower” (1996), *Republicanism* (1997), “Republican Liberty, Contestatory Democracy” (1999); and Spitz, *La liberté politique* (1995). Other contemporary writers sometimes associated with republican ideas include Frank Michelman, Charles Taylor, and Michael Sandel, but in my view these are better regarded as civic humanists or communitarians (see chapter seven); obviously, distinctions of this sort are not always clear-cut. General discussions of the republican revival — critical and otherwise — abound, so I will not provide exhaustive references here.

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venerable classical tradition beginning at least with Cicero, and then running from Machiavelli, to James Harrington, and finally to the founders of the American Republic (Madison and Jefferson in particular). Other political theorists often seen as a part of the republican tradition include Aristotle, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Tocqueville, and a small army of somewhat lesser-known figures.⁸ As we shall see, which among these are central and which peripheral to the classical tradition is a matter of some dispute.⁹

Civic humanists are mostly interested in reviving the classical republican argument that various civic virtues and widespread political participation are essential for healthy democratic polities. Accordingly, they emphasize those parts of the classical tradition in which these concerns are most prominent. In particular, they draw heavily on Aristotle, Machiavelli, and Tocqueville, and they tend to emphasize the earlier revolutionary period of the American founding, most prominently represented by Jefferson, at the expense of the later constitutional period. Indeed, some civic humanists go so far as to regard the Federal Constitution of 1787 as a betrayal of classical republican principles.¹⁰

No doubt many of the classical republicans were quite concerned with civic virtue and political participation, but this concern can be interpreted in (at least) two ways: on the one hand, civic virtue and political participation might be regarded as goods *instrumental* for the maintenance of liberal democratic institutions; on the other hand,

⁸ Among these are: the Roman historians Sallust and Livy; the Renaissance Italians, Leonardo Bruni and Alamanno Rinuccini; the seventeenth-century English commonwealthmen Marchamont Nedham, John Milton (the poet), Henry Nevile, Algernon Sidney (a favorite of Thomas Jefferson), and Walter Moyle; some of the eighteenth-century English whigs, especially John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon (the authors of *Cato's Letters*), and William Blackstone; and the English defenders of the American Revolution, Thomas Paine, Richard Price, and Joseph Priestly (the chemist). Classical republicanism is generally thought to have petered out around the time of Tocqueville.

⁹ The terms 'civic humanism' and 'civic republicanism' refer to contemporary writers only: the term 'classical republicanism' refers to any writer in the republican tradition through Tocqueville.

¹⁰ See for example, Arendt, *On Revolution* (1963), ch. 6; or Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic*. (1969), ch. 13.

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they might be regarded as *intrinsically valuable*, and even constitutive of the good life properly understood. Under the first, weaker reading, the concerns of classical republicans are easily folded back into mainstream liberalism — provided, of course, the empirical claims on which they rest turn out to be true. In other words, so long as civic virtues and political participation are in fact necessary for the maintenance of liberal democratic institutions, there is no good reason for a mainstream liberal not to argue on their behalf. Republicanism then amounts, at best, to a minor amendment of standard liberal doctrine.¹¹ Civic humanists have accordingly committed themselves to the second, stronger reading. But once overtly presented as a perfectionist conception of the good, classical republicanism appears implausible and even elitist. For many contemporary political theorists, it simply does not seem reasonable to insist that the active political life is the only good life, and even supposing otherwise, it is not a life in which all the members of a community can feasibly participate insofar as meaningful participation is necessarily a scarce good in modern mass democracies.¹²

Faced with this dilemma, civic republicans generally reject the stronger claims made by civic humanists on behalf of civic virtue and political participation, and embrace the weaker “instrumental” reading of the classical republican tradition. In their view, however, the classical republicans were doing much more than pointing out the importance of civic virtue and political participation: actually, they were attempting to articulate — in an admittedly haphazard and unsystematic fashion — a theory of justice different in many important ways from, for example, the liberal-contractualist theories

¹¹ Exactly such an incorporation by amendment is attempted in Dagger, *Civic Virtues* (1997).

¹² Something like this dilemma facing civic humanism is raised by Herzog, “Some Questions for Republicans” (1986), p. 481–490; and Rawls, *op. cit.* (1993), p. 205–206; and is given a detailed treatment in Patten, “The Republican Critique of Liberalism” (1996).

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exemplified by Locke, Kant, or Rawls.¹³ Civic republicans typically prefer Cicero and Montesquieu to Aristotle and Tocqueville, and they maintain the later constitutional period of the American founding, most prominently represented by Madison, better fits with the classical republican tradition than the earlier revolutionary period. As for Machiavelli, civic republicans insist he has been seriously misunderstood by civic humanists.

§ 3. THE REPUBLICAN CONCEPTION OF JUSTICE

To date, Philip Pettit's *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (1997) represents the most comprehensive attempt to spell out what a republican theory of justice might look like, and what its various policy implications might be.¹⁴ The basic idea is roughly as follows (a more elaborate account can be found in chapter seven): First, define freedom *not* as the absence of interference or restraint, as in standard accounts of negative liberty, but rather as the absence of domination. Once the various implications of this modification are properly understood, the "republican" conception of liberty can be seen to have all the advantages of the standard negative liberty view, without its well-known liabilities.¹⁵ Second, define justice as the maximization of freedom so understood. Structurally speaking, this results in a teleological conception of justice not unlike utilitarianism, but with freedom as non-domination taking the place of utility as the proper object of maximization. In terms of its justificatory apparatus, the republican theory of justice is not perfectly neutral, because the normative argument on its behalf is

¹³ This is not to say classical republicanism and classical liberalism were always clearly distinct from one another, as Haakonssen usefully reminds us: "Republicanism" (1993), p. 570–572.

¹⁴ I should perhaps caution my readers here that Philip Pettit is not responsible for the particular interpretations of his work that follows.

¹⁵ For the standard account of negative liberty, see Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty" (1958); a discussion of the relationship between freedom and non-domination can be found in chapter six, sect. 38–39.

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based in an account of the human good as importantly including the value of non-domination.

Without launching into a complete defense of the republican theory of justice here (either Pettit's, or my own variant), which in any case would be well beyond the scope of our present concern, let me suggest a few reasons constructing such a theory might be thought valuable. These reasons stem mainly from my dissatisfaction with the standard liberal-contractualist accounts of justice that are currently dominant in (at least western) political philosophy.¹⁶ On the one hand, there are problems with these accounts at the level of theory — problems mainly associated with their reliance on a strong doctrine of consent. Consent-based theories of justice generally try to avoid directly offering any substantive account of the good, and purport to offer instead procedural mechanisms from which we can derive principles of justice indirectly. It is my view that this sort of indirect procedural approach inevitably fails, and further that it fails specifically because outcomes are so heavily dependent on the form of the procedure adopted that we cannot evaluate the procedures themselves except by covertly evaluating their attendant outcomes in terms of some conception of the good. This and other theoretical problems with consent-based accounts of justice are discussed in chapter seven.

On the other hand, there are problems with liberal-contractualism not at the level of theory, but at the level of practice. Outside academic political philosophy, the liberal-contractualist account of justice is not nearly so popular: rather, I believe the most important challenge is to address the view one might call “common-sense

¹⁶ The sorts of theories I have in mind include: original position theories, such as those of Rawls and his followers; impartiality theories such as those of Scanlon, Barry, or Nagel; and democratic legitimacy theories such as those of Habermas, Cohen, and others. For discussion, see chapter seven, sect. 42–43.

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libertarianism.”¹⁷ The need for a progressive political philosophy that can effectively compete with common-sense libertarianism has become especially pressing with the collapse of radical theories such as Marxism and socialism. So long as the latter were taken seriously, some version of liberal-contractualism could be seen as a sort of progressive middle-way, but this is no longer the case: now in direct competition with common-sense libertarianism, liberal-contractualism fares rather poorly in practice. (I describe this as a problem of practice because among academic political philosophers, the serious problems with libertarianism are widely acknowledged.) There are a variety of reasons for this. Some of them are connected with the top-heavy nature of liberal-contractualist theories of justice: whereas common-sense libertarianism can rely (deceptively, no doubt) on a few elegant and straight-forward arguments, the indirect procedural approach described above requires a conceptual apparatus quite cumbersome in comparison. There are other reasons as well, but it is not so important to elaborate on these here.

A republican theory of justice along the lines suggested above holds out the possibility not only of avoiding the problems associated with liberal-contractualism at the level of theory, but also of serving as a viable progressive alternative to common-sense libertarianism at the level of practice.¹⁸ It does this by exploiting a curious asymmetry (which has been noticed by others) in our moral intuitions with regards to the good and

¹⁷ Boaz, *Libertarianism* (1997), or Murray, *What It Means to Be a Libertarian* (1997), can be taken as examples of the sort of common-sense libertarianism I have in mind.

¹⁸ To be clear, I do not mean to imply a republican theory of justice is not a ‘liberal’ theory, broadly construed. On most interpretations, republicanism would qualify for membership in what Rawls has called the “family of reasonable liberal conceptions of justice”: see Rawls, *The Law of Peoples* (1999), p. 14. Many readers will regard as curious, however, the notion that civic republicanism could serve as a particularly *progressive* political philosophy. Some reasons for believing the contrary will, I hope, become apparent by the conclusion of this work.

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just on the one hand, and the evil and unjust on the other. In either case we may be able to find normative propositions nearly anyone would agree with, but whereas in the former case these propositions tend to be vague and empty — such as, “democracy is good,” or “justice is giving each their due” —, in the latter case these proposition tend to be specific and concrete — such as, “rape and torture are wrong,” or “slavery is unjust.” I do not know why this is the case (assuming it is). Nevertheless, we ought to take full advantage of the opportunity it provides in constructing a theory of justice “from the ground up” — working directly, as Judith Shklar would say, from some concrete *summum malum* (in this case, political domination) rather than some vague and hypothetical *summum bonum*.¹⁹ A less romantic path, perhaps, but also one less fraught with the dangers particular to political philosophy.

It is too early to say whether this effort will succeed, but of course there is no way to be sure one way or the other without trying to work out the theory itself. The contemporary civic republican project should be viewed as a thought experiment, a voyage of exploration that has only just left port.

§ 4. THE PRESENT SITUATION

Regardless of one’s opinion about the prospects for developing a republican theory of justice, the connection between that project and the study of political domination — a primary motivation for the present work — should at any rate now be clear. Before going much further, I should caution that no attempt to present a complete theory of justice will

¹⁹ Shklar, “The Liberalism of Fear” (1989). Of course, any completely elaborated theory of justice will have to be sophisticated and complex: the point is rather than it should be grounded directly on some core of concrete, straight-forward, and powerful intuitions.

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be made here. Chapter seven sketches some of its general structural features, and chapter eight suggests some of its possible applications, but the main focus remains simply on understanding political domination itself. A theory of political domination is merely one building block in a much larger project.

While important for republican political theory, a study of political domination may of course interest a much broader audience. Its value does not depend on one's commitment either to a specific view of political liberty, or to a republican conception of justice more generally: indeed, the discussion that follows undoubtedly will seem almost wholly detached from what many readers would regard as typical of the contemporary civic republican literature. This does not strike me as a problem. On the contrary, as I pointed out above, the concept of domination is employed in a wide range of political arguments, and so a robust account of the phenomenon will be valuable even for those not particularly interested in, or even sympathetic with the agenda of contemporary civic republicanism. Merely working out such an account proves no easy task. Along the way, we must grapple with a remarkable diversity of complex and difficult issues in social theory and political philosophy — some obvious and perennial, others unexpected and arcane. The fact that working out a theory of political domination involves so many interrelated and fascinating problems is itself, in my view, a reason for trying.

Similarly, the success of the present study does not hinge on how the historical debate described above between civic humanists and civic republicans turns out: whatever view the classical republicans actually had, this should not matter with regards to what the best theory of political domination actually is. This does not mean I am uninterested in intellectual history, but rather that for the purposes of this particular study, I will bring in past views of political domination only to the extent that they generally facilitate our

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present understanding. The main reason for this division of labor is simply that a wealth of excellent historical work on classical republicanism already exists, whereas the more analytic task of working out a republican theory of justice has only recently begun.

An obvious question before directly launching into the project is, What accounts are presently available? A study of political domination would naturally be less pressing if a good account of the phenomenon were readily available. As indicated above, however, such accounts are not so common as one might expect.

The best-known and most often referred to accounts of domination are probably those of G. W. F. Hegel, in the famous “lordship-bondage” passage of the *Phenomenology*, and Max Weber, in the sections of *Economy and Society* concerned with authority.²⁰ Theories of domination are also commonly attributed to Karl Marx and Michel Foucault.²¹ The only focused and detailed analyses of political domination I have found in the contemporary literature are those found in chapter six of Thomas Wartenberg’s *The Forms of Power* (1990), and in chapter two of Philip Pettit’s above mentioned book, *Republicanism*. The term ‘domination’ does not merit an entry in *The Social Science Encyclopedia* (1996), *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Political Science* (1991), the *Dictionary of Political Thought* (1996), the *Encyclopedia of Sociology* (2000), or any other similar reference work.²²

²⁰ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) §§ 178–196: p. 111–119; Weber, *Economy and Society* (1978), esp. p. 53–54, 212–301, 941–955. In both, the discussion is of *Herrschaft*, which in the former case is usually translated as “lordship,” and in the latter case as “domination.” Some discussion of Weber can be found in chapter four, sect. 21, and of Hegel in chapter six, sect. 36.

²¹ Neither, however, use the term “domination” with any frequency. The former’s theory of domination is usually found by glossing “exploitation” as “domination,” and the latter by glossing “power” as “domination.” Either glossing could be disputed. (Foucault did, in a late interview, distinguish power from domination somewhat, but he did not have the chance to develop this line thought: see “The Ethic of Care for the Self” (1988), esp. p. 3 ff.)

²² The *Blackwell Dictionary of Twentieth Century Social Thought* (1992), has an entry under the heading ‘domination’, referring the reader to ‘authority’: but apart from defining authority as “legitimate

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The remaining variously scattered discussions of political domination fall into four groups. First, there are small number of works entirely devoted to the discussion of one or more instances of domination, which nevertheless fail to provide much better than a brief ad hoc analysis of the concept itself. Good examples include Albert Memmi's *Dominated Man* (1971), Barry Adam's *The Survival of Domination* (1978), and James Scott's *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (1990). These are interesting and valuable works, and I do not want to claim that the absence of such an analysis should be viewed as a serious flaw. Their interests, quite simply, are different from mine. For example, Adam's book is not about developing a theory of political domination per se, but rather about the ways in which dominated groups cope with their situation in everyday life. To this end, one can easily get by with a rough-and-ready notion of domination, specified only to the point where it becomes possible to identify with some confidence a few dominated groups. The same goes for Scott's book, which is primarily concerned with bringing to light what he calls the "hidden transcripts" of the domination experience; and Memmi's book, which is a collection of essays on a variety topics, linked only in the fact that they concern historically dominated groups. Other than these, I have not been able to find any book-length treatments of the phenomenon.

Second, there are number of relatively short — consisting of a few paragraphs at most — undetailed, and often vague accounts of political domination which appear in the course of a work concerned mainly with some other topic. None of these are particularly well-known, nor are they generally very illuminating. To pick one example more or less

domination," no discussion of domination can found there. Other reference works without entries under the heading 'domination' include: the *Reader's Guide to the Social Sciences* (2001), the *Blackwell Dictionary of Political Science* (1999), the *Blackwell Companion to Political Philosophy* (1993), and the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (1968).

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at random, Amy Allen offers a short analysis of domination in her book, *The Power of Feminist Theory* (1999), p. 124–125. She concludes this discussion by offering the following definition: “Domination entails the ability of an actor or set of actors to constrain the choices of another actor or set of actors in a nontrivial way, and in a way that works to the others’ disadvantage.” Again, it is not necessarily an objection to her work that she fails to provide a more detailed account, for she is mainly concerned with other issues.

Third, there are a few instances in which an author holds out the promise of an extended discussion of political domination, and then fails to deliver one. For example, one might expect a book titled *Domination and Power* (by Peter Miller, 1987) to offer a theory of domination, but in fact it is about something else entirely: namely, it is a critique of critical theory’s approach to the problem of how the individual agent (“subjectivity”) is historically constituted. Similarly, consider Timo Airaksinen’s essay, “The Rhetoric of Domination” (1992). The first sentence of this essay reads, “The crudest mechanism of interpersonal domination is *coercion*” (emphasis in original), and a discussion of the latter concept — not the former — and its relation to rhetoric ensues.

Finally, there are innumerable writings, on almost every conceivable topic, in which the term domination appears here and there in the general course of discussion, sometimes even in the title, without any apparent concern for what it means. Examples of this are far too numerous to cite in any comprehensive manner, and in any case their very lack of concern for analyzing the meaning of political domination renders them uninteresting. Perhaps its meaning is thought to be obvious and unproblematic, and indeed perhaps it is — though, of course, it does not appear so to me.

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This hopefully will more than satisfy the reader that we are not covering over-trodden ground in what follows.

§ 5. POTENTIAL OBJECTIONS

Nevertheless, one might well wonder why political domination has almost completely escaped thorough examination. The reason for this, I suspect, is that many believe great and possibly insurmountable difficulties stand in the way of success. There are a variety of ways in which the attempt to produce such a theory might be expected to fail.

First, there is the obvious possibility that political domination is not an independent or coherent concept at all. That is, one might find on close analysis that the instances taken to be examples of political domination are merely instances of other already well-known phenomena (for example, power, hegemony, inequality²³), or even worse not instances of any single phenomenon at all. In this case the term ‘domination’ might turn out to be either mere empty rhetoric — just a sloppy, shorthand way of saying some arrangement or state of affairs is bad without specifying why —, or else a terminological redundancy worth dispensing with. It is my contention, of course, that this is not the case, and that there exists an independent and coherent idea to which many people refer by using the term ‘domination’. To be sure, the term itself might often be employed as instrumental rhetoric, but its very rhetorical force in my view stems from a hazy notion regarding some specific condition or experience it is meant to capture.

²³ Adam, *The Survival of Domination* (1978), p. 8, for example, comes very near offering an account of domination that would reduce it to the mere systematic inequality of opportunity. This, it seems to me, must be an *effect* of domination, but not the thing itself. I discuss domination and power in chapter three, domination and hegemony in chapter four.

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Even supposing political domination does exist as an independent and coherent concept, a second possibility is that it might turn out to refer to a purely subjective experience and not to an objectively definable arrangement or state of affairs. Political domination might then be something a person or group can subjectively experience, but not something that can be adequately described from an external observer perspective. A similar problem would arise if the forms political domination takes are so historically mutable that no single objective description can hope to capture more than a single form present at one particular time and place.²⁴ In either case, while the goal of my project could be sound, the particular approach adopted (more on this below) certainly is not. Perhaps the best approach to understanding political domination would consist in something quite different — say, in the exploration of domination narratives.

Supposing this first two problems are surmounted, there remains yet a third: while political domination may exist as an externally definable arrangement or state of affairs, it may turn out that various problems of measurement or interpersonal comparison render the concept impossible to implement in practice. Naturally, this third problem represents much less of a threat to the narrow project here than the first two: though less satisfying perhaps, a study concluding that some particular avenue of thought will in the end bear no fruit can still be successful. One important implication of a negative conclusion here would be that, whatever else its merits, the republican theory of justice as currently envisioned can not be implemented successfully. My hope is that this will not turn out to be the case, but it is nevertheless a real possibility.

²⁴ Versions of the latter objection appear in Adam, *ibid.*, p. 6–8, and Miller, *op cit.* (1987), p. 9–10.

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These three problems represent “null-hypotheses” against which the success of the following project can be measured. The best way to overcome these obstacles is simply to do what they suggest cannot be done: that is, construct a persuasive theory of domination referring to an externally definable state of affairs that can usefully be put to work in thinking about normative political problems.

§ 6. THE GENERAL APPROACH

A project of the sort contemplated here may be thought to raise a number of methodological problems. It would be natural to ask, at this juncture, How does one go about developing a successful theory of the sort I have described? Allow me to first point out a few things I will *not* attempt to do.

To begin with, this will not simply be a linguistic analysis of what people (past political or social theorists, contemporary political or social theorists, or ordinary people) actually mean when they use the word ‘domination’.²⁵ No doubt many different people mean and have meant many different things by this word, and there is not one and only one correct definition to be had; quite the contrary, in my view, there is no truth in definitions per se. What is interesting is not the *word* being used, but rather the specific *felt experience* to which (English) speakers attempt to refer by using the word ‘domination’. My hope is to understand that experience and its significance for social theory and political philosophy. Thinking about what various people mean when they use the word is only one way of gaining purchase on the underlying experience; it is certainly not the only way, nor even necessarily the best way. In my view, a linguistic analysis of

²⁵ See appendix A, however, for some historical notes on the term ‘domination’.

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the word ‘domination’ alone, while perhaps not entirely useless, would be rather uninteresting.

Neither will this study attempt to solve some empirical puzzle of the sort studied in standard social science research. There are no doubt many interesting empirical questions related to political domination, as for example: For what historical reasons do systems of political domination arise? What makes some systems of political domination more or less severe than others? What are the political, historical, psychological, etc., effects of these systems? What are people’s opinions or attitudes regarding particular systems of political domination? Any of these questions might be worthy subjects of research, but they will not be addressed here (at least not directly).²⁶ Our present task is in a logical sense — though not necessarily a practical sense — prior to any of these, in that to engage in an empirical investigation of some aspect of political domination, one ought beforehand have a clear idea of what it is one intends to investigate. In my experience, the subject of much social science research is by no means often very clear, though this does not often retard the progress of investigation.

The present study is rather addressed to the reader who wants to know *what this thing we call political domination is*, and *why we should regard it as a bad thing*, if we should; persons believing these questions have obvious answers will no doubt be impatient to get on to other tasks. The end product will be a general, normative theory of political domination: a piece of conceptual architecture that can be efficaciously employed in making normative arguments regarding what we should and should not do. In the course

²⁶ At various points in the argument, of course, I will have to make assumptions regarding the correct answer to empirical questions of the sort mentioned. Ideally, these assumptions should be as weak as possible, uncontroversial, and express rather than implied.

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of developing this theory, I will employ a variety of methodological techniques — including (but not limited to) philosophical analysis, formal modeling, social theory, and the history of ideas — just insofar as they appear helpful for the various challenges that present themselves along the way. My considered methodological view one might call *casually pragmatic*: develop the theory first, see whether it is useful and persuasive, and sort out the methodological details later. For those readers interested in the discussion of such issues, I offer a methodological essay in chapter ten, but in rough form the idea I have is the following:

Like Max Weber, I regard the domain of social phenomena as, in itself, an undifferentiated mass. There is nothing inherent in the social phenomena themselves necessitating the particular ways in which any given observer perceives them to be discretely differentiated into concepts, classes, or categories. The decision to section off any particular segment of this undifferentiated mass for special investigation will thus necessarily be evaluative (implicitly, if not explicitly).²⁷ This is no argument against the study of social phenomena, of course, but it does suggest progress in such studies would be greatly facilitated if people were agreed about which scheme of concepts to impose on the undifferentiated mass of social phenomena — or at least with regards to the particular segment under debate. Part of the project here will be to construct a conceptual box of this sort. Once we are clear on the exact specifications of this box, it becomes a matter of empirical observation sorting real-world social phenomena into or out of its confines as the case may be.

²⁷ See Weber, “‘Objectivity’ in Social Science” (1904).

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This is not all, however, for the conceptual box constructed for this project will have a particular role: namely, I intend it to serve as one (major) component in an account of justice. This means there will be a second stage to the study, in which it will be argued that arrangements or states of affairs counting as instances of political domination have certain normatively undesirable properties.

The division between these two stages in the argument is replicated in the division of this study into two parts: Part one consists of a descriptive analysis of political domination, where the task is mainly to construct a conceptual box of the sort described above. Part two consists of a normative analysis of political domination, where the task is mainly to show why arrangements or states of affairs that qualify as instances of political domination according to the descriptive analysis are normatively undesirable.

The strict division maintained here between the descriptive and the normative aspects of the argument will no doubt be controversial, but it is nevertheless essential for properly conducted political philosophy. Suppose one wants to argue that *X* is a normatively bad thing. Now further suppose we are considering a number of real-world states of affairs, *a*, *b*, *c*, etc., and want to know what we should do about them: for this it becomes necessary to determine which of these count as genuine instances of *X* and which do not. Clearly, it cannot be a criterion of membership in *X* that these states of affairs are normatively bad, for then we would not have succeeded in making a non-circular argument for why *X* itself is normatively bad: rather, we must have made some version of the useless claim, “bad states of affairs are bad.” In order to avoid this pitfall, it must be possible to say whether real-world states of affairs, *a*, *b*, *c*, etc., count as an instance of *X* without directly saying whether that particular state of affairs itself is good or bad. For this to be possible, the descriptive account of *X* must be separated from the

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normative account of *X*. By this I do not mean that our *selection* of a particular account of *X* must be based on non-normative criteria: quite the contrary, as I have already said, there is no objective truth to definitions per se. Rather, I mean that with respect to the account of *X* we *do* select, it must be a feature of that account that real-world states of affairs can be identified or described as instances (or not) of *X* without reference to the normative properties of those instances in question.²⁸

As this claim will crop up again and again in the work that follows, let me emphasize one point: in no sense do I mean to dismiss or disparage the role of normative theory. It is important to emphasize this because, at various junctures in part one, I will insist on excluding normative questions from the descriptive argument. This is strictly because, to repeat, this exclusion at the descriptive stage is a necessary condition of later developing a successful normative argument. However, there would be little or no point in undertaking these descriptive labors in the first place if it were not for the normative theory that follows: the normative analysis is the very *raison d'être* of the descriptive analysis.

This exact problem has been discussed extensively in legal philosophy, where the claim I have just advanced often goes by the name of the *separation thesis*.²⁹ In that context, the question is whether one should be able to identify something as a law without saying whether it is a good or bad law. The importance of the separation thesis is by no means limited to the province of jurisprudence, however, and accordingly a more detailed discussion can be found in chapter ten.

²⁸ This need not be a feature of *all* concepts in political philosophy: different concepts serve different roles in a theoretical system. But for an argument in moral or practical philosophy to work, it is necessary that at least *some* concepts have this feature. For further discussion, see chapter ten, esp. sect. 52.

²⁹ Appendix B discusses the separation thesis in legal philosophy.

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§ 7. CHAPTER OUTLINE

The most important division of this work has already been mentioned: namely, the division between the descriptive analysis in part one, and the normative analysis in part two. The remaining details of the chapter outline can be reviewed without fanfare.

According to the descriptive analysis of part one, political domination should be understood as a condition suffered by persons or groups whenever they are dependent on a social relationship in which some other person or group wields arbitrary powers over them. This conception of political domination naturally divides into three constituent elements: the idea of being dependent on a social relationship, the idea of having social power over another person or group, and the idea of being able to wield such power arbitrarily. These are the topics of chapters two, three, and four respectively. Although the core descriptive argument is complete by the end of chapter four, where the final statement of my conception of political domination can be found, it is sometimes useful to construct a formal model as a means of further clarifying basic ideas. Accordingly, a model of this sort is offered in chapter five.

According to the normative analysis in part two, we should regard it as unjust to suffer under political domination, and thus we should in the interest of justice seek to minimize political domination in any society. This part of the argument can also be divided into three components: first, an account of why political domination should be regarded as unjust; second, an outline of how a theory of justice based on this idea would be structured; and third, examples of how such a theory of justice might operate in practice. These are the topics of chapters six, seven, and eight respectively.

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After this, the work is rounded off with a short conclusion (chapter nine), a methodological essay (chapter ten), and various appendices.