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The dilemma of the black radical: Bayard Rustin's ambivalent anarchism

Let your life be a counter friction to stop the machine.

HENRY DAVID THOREAU

We need in every community a group of angelic troublemakers. Our power is in our ability to make things unworkable. All we have is our bodies. We need to tuck them, tuck them in places so that the wheels don't turn.

BAYARD RUSTIN

I

Strom Thurmond introduced Bayard Rustin to greater America in 1963. The seasoned white supremacist, hoping to delegitimize the March on Washington by smearing Rustin, its principle organizer, took the senate floor, calling Rustin a “draft-dodging, communist, pervert.” Rustin survived the senator’s onslaught, overseeing perhaps the most influential political gathering in American history. But for all of Rustin’s work at the center of American social movement organizing and his influence on American social and political history, he has been aptly called “Brother Outsider.”

Rustin’s homosexuality meant that for much of the modern civil rights movement he was relegated to the margins, the shadows. But in an ironic twist, Rustin’s marginal status as an openly homosexual black male has recently thrust him into the center of contemporary academic and activist

circles, with queer theorists and queer liberation activists leading the charge to recover Rustin's story. With a 10,000 page FBI file, Rustin's most influential years might rest in the future.

As a contributor to nearly every major American leftist movement from the mid-1930s through the end of the 1980s, Rustin's life defies facile definition. Raised in a black Quaker household in West Chester, Pennsylvania, Rustin entered the world on March 17, 1912, just as Teddy Roosevelt waged the last competitive third-party presidential campaign; Rustin's last hours came in August 1987, just as Ronald Reagan ended his second term as president and completed his effort to roll back the New Deal. There is hardly a leftist cause that Rustin, as a full-time activist, did not contribute to during the period running from 1932 to 1987.

By his mid-twenties, a self-styled Gandhian Quaker, Rustin had immersed himself in the antiwar and communist movements. In 1936 Rustin joined the Young Communist League, an organization that accepted as members "all proletariats" between the ages 14 and 30. And Rustin found himself living in the hotbed of black intellectual and political life when he moved to Harlem in 1937. In Harlem, Rustin made two acquaintances that would transform his life. To begin, Rustin met A. Philip Randolph who later appointed Rustin as principal organizer of the March on Washington Movement during the 1940s and the March for Jobs and Freedom in 1963. During this time Rustin would also befriend A. J. Muste, who became director of the Fellowship of Reconciliation in 1941 and added Rustin to his staff soon after. Involved in two organizations that had long utilized mass protest and organized civil disobedience to challenge the status quo, Rustin helped bridge the work of Muste's FOR and Randolph's Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters.

From 1941 through 1952 Rustin worked as FOR's youth secretary and then led its race relations efforts; he followed that with a stint with the War Resisters League. During this time he became intimately involved in the civil rights movement, organizing several major initiatives and demonstrations, including serving as a founding member of the Congress for Racial Equality and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and serving as an "adult" adviser to the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. And as is widely known, he was a longtime adviser to Martin Luther King Jr, leading some to refer to Rustin as the mastermind *behind* the modern civil rights movement. Toward the end of the 1960s he directed the A. Phillip Randolph Institute, a position funded in part by the American Federation of Labor, giving him an opportunity to concentrate his efforts on economic justice.

During the course of his career, Rustin worked alongside Norman Thomas, Evan Thomas, Eleanor Roosevelt, James Farmer, George Houser, Bill Sutherland, Michael Harrington, Ella Baker, Bob Moses, Stokely Carmichael, Staughton Lynd, and Walter Reuther, just to name a few. Internationally, for most of the 1940s and 1950s Rustin was the face of the

burgeoning civil rights movement. He traveled to India to meet with Nehru in 1948; he worked with Nkrumah in Ghana in the early 1950s. Later, in the early to mid-1980s, he spent time in South Africa with figures such as Desmond Tutu and Poland with Lech Walesa as activists in those places organized Gandhian styled nonviolent revolutions.

Those familiar with Rustin's activism may find surprising my assertion that he can be classified as an anarchist. Asserting that Rustin was an anarchist is likely to be rejected altogether by those who remember Rustin for his insistence on the importance of a strong state for the liberation of the marginalized and oppressed. Dissimilar from Henry David Thoreau and Dorothy Day, Rustin did not publicly denounce the state as such. He did not reject electoral politics. He did not take up a Federalist position. Rather, he devoted the better part of his middle to late career as an activist lobbying the American federal government in one form or another, seeking the passage of new legislation. Thus it would appear at first an error, some great confusion to attach the appellation anarchist to Bayard Rustin. He was many things: black in the Jim Crow era, Communist in the Age of McCarthy, gay before Stonewall, and a pacifist in the age of fascism, Nazism, and the Cold War. But how could he be an anarchist?

To answer this question we must simply appreciate that, while many aspects of Rustin's activist career are open to question, there is no doubt about his status as one of the world's leading radical pacifists and proponents of nonviolent direct action some three decades before Randolph called on him to organize the March on Washington in 1963. Rustin's commitment to radical pacifism is crucial for our purposes in that, if I am correct, it has as its implication an anarchist ethic. Specifically, in my view, *radical* pacifism entails an acceptance of *strong* anarchism. A person can be a strong anarchist without being a pacifist, yet an absolute pacifist must reject the modern territorial state, and so should be categorized as some kind of anarchist.

Pacifism comes in many varieties, yet as a general matter pacifists are opposed to political violence, particularly the practice of war. There are *absolute* and *nonabsolute* pacifists. *Nonabsolute* pacifists reject war as a social practice and sometimes reject all organized violence, including that employed by domestic police; but nonabsolute pacifists may allow for the private use of violence in order to fend off unjust attackers. Many nonabsolute pacifists describe themselves as *contingent* pacifists. Contingent pacifists essentially maintain that most but not all wars are wrong. *Absolute* pacifists, on the other hand, regard all intentional killing as wrong, even objecting to the personal-private employment of violence in cases where a person is being unjustly attacked. So contrary to contingent pacifists, absolute pacifists assert that war is always wrong.

Pacifism comes in both pragmatic and principled versions. Contingent pacifists are ordinarily *pragmatic* pacifists whereas absolute pacifists are typically *principled* pacifists in that they base their pacifism on (a priori)

principles. Pragmatic pacifists do not argue that war is wrong because it is always morally wrong to intentionally kill individual persons. Rather, pragmatic pacifists assert that war should be opposed because war represents an *ineffective* way to realize the ends that are ordinarily presented in order to justify recourse to war. Nuclear pacifists, that is, pacifists who argue that war is obsolete in the light of the proliferation of nuclear weaponry, are probably best described as pragmatic (contingent) pacifists: their rejection or acceptance of war is *contingent* on certain material conditions, conditions that if altered would in turn necessitate a changed stance vis-à-vis the moral acceptability of war.

The majority of pacifist activists during the period just prior to and just after World War I were nonabsolute pacifists—progressive reformers who concentrated their activism on building coalitions of pacifists and striving to create a permanent international congress to mediate and arbitrate disputes between territorial states so as to avoid war.¹ This group included John Dewey, Jane Addams, and Jessie Wallace Hughan. Reform-oriented organizations established between 1915 and 1920 include the Women's Peace Party-New York Branch (1915) and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (1919). These organizations belonged to the Outlawry Movement and participated in advocacy for treaties such as the Kellogg-Briand Pact, which made war illegal and was a precursor to the United Nations system of international law.

We can hardly understand leftist activism in contemporary America if we don't appreciate the importance of the contingent of *radical* pacifists who emerged from the period of promise and upheaval that marked the first decades of the twentieth century. Several factors radicalized a segment of the peace movement during the 1920s and 1930s. First, the devastation wrought by World War I convinced many that reforming the territorial state system (i.e. the Westphalian system)—a system that arose with the Peace of Westphalia and culminated with the Treaty of Paris and Vienna Congress that coincided with the defeat of Napoleon in 1815—would be insufficient. Abolishing the system would be the only way to save “humankind.” The increased connection between the socialist and pacifist movements during the period between 1915 and the late 1920s also affected pacifist activists. In particular, socialist and pacifist criticisms of colonialism and attribution of the cause of World War I to the “Scramble for Africa” led to analyses that linked the violence of the territorial state to racism and capitalism. Third, the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia excited revolutionaries and reformers, pacifist and socialist alike. The overthrow of the Russian Tsar confirmed a belief that had moved many activists during the end of the second decade of the twentieth century—the belief in the possibility of the radical transformation of society. For the first time since perhaps the American and French revolutions (of the 1770s through 1790s) it seemed manifestly clear that the social world could be

remade. In such a context, reformers became radical revolutionaries. This brings us to the final major radicalizing cause that warrants mention. Anticolonialism in India captivated the world. Mohandas Gandhi's *satyagraha* and concomitant nonviolent direct action inspired pacifists from London to Chicago.

Radical pacifists, as Scott H. Bennett points out, are typically absolute pacifists who oppose "all wars or armed social revolution, support . . . both peace and social justice . . . [and advocate for] nonviolent social and democratic 'socialist' revolution."² With roots in the radical reformation, the American abolitionist movement, and socialism, radical pacifists maintain that only by radically transforming the social structure can war and injustice be eliminated, and they have insisted that individual persons are in fact capable of instigating social reconstruction. Following Garrison, Thoreau, Tolstoy, and Gandhi, radical pacifists maintain that evil social structures are only able to survive because so many people unconsciously cooperate with the rulers whose interests it is to preserve the structures. Noncooperation is proposed as a way to awaken one's fellows and as a way to deprive the state of the support that it needs in order to sustain its unjust practices. With the Indian example appearing to confirm the truth of Thoreauvian and Tolstoyan theories of social change, radical pacifists turned to advocacy for and exercise of nonviolent protest, resistance, and direct action, including political and civil disobedience.

The significance of radical pacifism during the late 1940s can hardly be overstated. Founding the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and conducting nonviolent direct action campaigns and training throughout the country, radical pacifists set the stage for the mass movement that emerged during the mid-1950s.³ James R. Tracy describes them in *Direct Action: Radical Pacifism from the Union Eight to the Chicago Seven*:

The radical pacifists who founded CORE operated in an American reform tradition that espoused faith that if a small group of people—or even an individual—behaves in a utopian fashion, the results could be revolutionary for the entire society. This reform tradition stretched back at least to the colonial Quakers and included Garrisonians and Thoreau, whose example radical pacifists often cited to support their actions.⁴

Speaking about the same group, D'Emilio intimates that Muste and FOR associates such as Jim Farmer, Glen Smiley, and Rustin belonged to a "new breed of pacifist" that helped redefine pacifist activism. This group turned wholeheartedly "to the example of Gandhi and the anticolonial movement he had spawned." According to D'Emilio, "Rustin was in the vanguard of this new confrontational approach that adapted Gandhian nonviolence to attacking racism in the United States."⁵

During the buildup to World War II Rustin, then a youth secretary with the FOR, traveled the country spreading the radical pacifist message and endeavoring to combat white supremacist oppression and militarism with Gandhian methods. FOR and its secular counterpart, the WRL, the nonreligious pacifist organization that emerged after World War I as an alternative to the religious Fellowship of Reconciliation, constituted a leading institution on the left wing of the peace movement. Under A. J. Muste's leadership, FOR organizers worked to forge a Christian radicalism that confront head-on the triple evils of modernity—capitalistic exploitation, militarism, and racism. What separated Muste's understudies from other radical leftists during our period was not simply a concern to combat the just mentioned evils or even the decision to pursue change via extrajudicial methods. Leninists, Social Gospel reformers, black separatists, suffragists, and others crowded the left toward the end of the Great Depression. Muste's concern to infuse American radicalism with a Gandhian ethos distinguished him from other notable activists and his encouragement of Rustin's interest in Gandhi proved remarkably important for Rustin's formation, and is an important factor as we endeavor to make political philosophical sense of Rustin's early activism and ethical commitments.

That so many persons have been designated Gandhians—Kwame Nkrumah, Martin Luther King Jr, Cesar Chavez, Lech Walesa, Desmond Tutu, Aung San Suu Kyi—makes it difficult to say exactly what being a Gandhian entails. That said, there are critical elements of Gandhian social philosophy uniting this disparate collection. Most important of course is the commitment to nonviolent resistance to social evil. And vital to this commitment is the mutual concern for self and others that implies love for enemies and underwrites the commitment to nonviolent action.⁶ It is the Gandhian's concern with the oppressor and the oppressed alike that informs the insistence on nonviolence or un-harmful (*a-himsa*) action. The Gandhian hopes to act in a way that does not harm but does in fact move persons who support oppressive practices. Gandhians hope that their acts of nonviolent resistance to evil will move members of the oppressed and oppressive classes to refrain from complying with oppressive social institutions and practices. In short, Gandhians aspire to convert their opponents, to transform their hearts.

From the mid-1930s up to the mid-1960s Rustin adopted an ethos of love-inflected sacrificial political ethics and embraced Gandhian philosophy in the fullest sense. This is crucial because insofar as one is committed to Gandhian ethics in this way, one will refrain from employing violence to accomplish one's social and political objectives, even indirectly by calling on the territorial state for support. More to the point, I want to suggest that a Gandhian is disposed to embrace commitments that would if generalized dissolve the territorial state. In fact, insofar as a Gandhian is an absolute pacifist, it would seem to me that a Gandhian must be an anarchist of one

variety or another. This crucial fact about Gandhian ethics provides a key to comprehending Rustin's career as an activist. As we move along, it will be clear that Rustin is unable to reconcile his commitment to radical pacifism and Gandhian nonviolence with his commitment to economic justice in the postindustrial era. Through the 1940s and 1950s, though, Rustin harbored no doubts about the viability of radical pacifism.

During this period Rustin and other radical pacifists, influenced by Gandhi, concentrated their efforts on combating two particular social evils: white supremacist oppression and militarism. With respect to these two issues, radical pacifists were willing to risk death, thereby living out the sacrificial ethical ethos exhibited by Indians in their confrontation with the British Empire. Reflecting his embrace of Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence, in "The Negro and Nonviolence," Rustin announced that "Nonviolence as a method has within it the demand for terrible sacrifice and long suffering, but as Gandhi has said, 'freedom does not drop from the sky.' One has to struggle and be willing to die for it."⁷ Rustin goes on to explain how his Quaker, Christian ethical commitments relate to his role in society and to state his view that self-reform is a precondition to social reform:

The primary function of a religious society is to "speak truth to power." The truth is that war is wrong. It is then our duty to make war impossible first in us and then in society.⁸

Rustin echoes other American activists who have preached self-reformation as the precondition to social reformation and thus belongs to the tradition of radicals that emphasizes living and speaking in fidelity to one's notion of the truth. Striving to "be the change that he wished to see," and speaking "truth to power," in November of 1943, Rustin refused to register for the draft that had been instituted in preparation for the American entry into World War II.

Rustin charted an anxiety-ridden path toward draft resistance. Pacifists, especially radical pacifists, have often targeted the state's conscription laws as a way of striking out against the authority of the state as such, as conscription laws epitomize the character of the state's claim of authority over persons in that the state asserts a right to command individual persons to kill and be killed on its behalf. By the time he wrote his "Letter to the Draft Board," Rustin had been a wholehearted pacifist activist for eight years. And as a Quaker since 1936, Rustin had the option of declaring himself a religious conscientious objector and reporting to a Civilian Public Service Camp in lieu of military service.⁹ Two factors motivated his decision to defy the Selective Service Act of 1940. To begin, at the time Rustin subscribed to a radical norm of nonviolence, one that put a premium on avoiding complying with immoral, unjust, and oppressive practices to the fullest extent possible. In practice evading complicity entailed adhering to

a standard of noncooperation. This noncooperation had two intermingled components: (1) Refusing to cooperate with authorities, when the commands in question required commission of unjust acts, served as prophetic witness against those authorities; and (2) it had the potential of disrupting the smooth functioning of the unjust system (i.e. the machine). In addition to the imperative of noncooperation, and perhaps related to it, Rustin had reservations about taking advantage of the religious exemption to military service since that policy discriminated against nonreligious objectors.

The United States has a long history of religious exemption from military service. Indeed, the First Congress of the United States considered providing constitutional exemption from military service for religious reasons, although ultimately no such exemption was included in the Bill of Rights. Nonetheless, the Draft Acts passed during the Civil War and the two World Wars provided exemption for religious conscientious objectors. The Selective Service Act of 1917 (1917 Draft Act) (P.L. 65–12, 40 Sec. 76) extended exemptions to persons belonging to a “well-recognized religious sect or organization [then] organized and existing and whose existing creed or principles [forbade] its members to participate in war in any form.” It was understood at the time that this only meant exemption for members of the historic peace churches—the Quakers, Mennonites, and Brethren. Most radical pacifists, anarchists, and atheists objected to the narrowness of the exemption. In the famous Selective Service Draft Law Cases of 1918 (245 US 366, 1918) the Supreme Court held that the privileging of persons belonging to pacifist religious sects did not violate the Establishment and Free Exercise (nondiscrimination) clauses of the First Amendment. Defendants in one of the draft cases, anarchists Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, convicted for “conspiring to impede registration,” asserted that the 1917 Draft Act constituted a law “respecting the establishment of religion,” “prohibiting the free exercise thereof,” “establishing inequality.” While the challenge to the narrowness of the exemption provided for in the 1917 Draft Act was immediately unsuccessful, Congress did widen the exemption in subsequent years.¹⁰

Advocacy by the American Friends Service Committee, FOR, and others led to broadened exemption in the 1940 Selective Service Training and Service Act (Selective Service Act). No longer would it be necessary to belong to a pacifist religious sect; a person could be granted exemption from military service insofar as the person’s opposition to war was rooted in “religious training and belief.” Nonmilitary public service would be accepted as an alternative to combat. And remarkably, religious conscientious objectors during World War II were sent to Civilian Public Service camps (CPS camps) that were actually administered and managed by the peace churches themselves, with government aid. While ostensibly a conciliatory arrangement, it incensed a wing of the radical left, namely active members of the War Resistance League. The Selective Service Act, though different

from previous acts, still denied nonreligious objectors exemption from military service. Resistance to war by nonreligious objectors meant jail time. Then executive of FOR A. J. Muste supported the church administered CPS camps and encouraged religious conscientious objectors to take advantage of the exemption provided by the Selective Service Act. This compromise with the "system" provoked many radicals, including David Dellinger and Evan Thomas, the brother of Norman Thomas, to resign their FOR membership. Dellinger and Thomas dismissed the religious exemption as unjustifiably discriminatory and regarded working in the civilian work camps as contributing to the war.

Rustin did not resign his post at FOR, yet he did opt against taking the religious exemption. Based on his philosophy of nonviolence and the norm of noncooperation, in solidarity with radical pacifists of the day who resented that nonreligious grounds were not accorded the same deference as religious bases, and under the influence of War Resisters League members John Haynes Holmes and Evan Thomas, Rustin wrote to the draft board articulating his decision to violate the Selective Service Act of 1940. He would go to prison rather than cooperate with the "propagation of evil."

Although Rustin did not seek formal religious exemption from the draft per the exception specified in the Selective Service Act, he resisted conscription on religious grounds and his "Letter to the Draft Board" is a textbook statement of religiously motivated denial of state sovereignty.¹¹ In the letter, he furnishes scripturally derived, spiritually mediated, religious reasons for his disobedience.

To begin, Rustin professed that his vocational calling contradicted the state's claim upon him; second, he asserted that his Christian beliefs entailed the rejection of nationalism, intentional killing, and the sovereignty of the modern nation-state insofar as that entity depended upon the practice of war; and finally, making a ethically informed practical claim, he contended that war constitutes an irrational means by which to create social order and cultivate friendship between persons.¹²

According to Rustin, in cases where one is called by God to do something that conflicts with a command issued by political authority, one has a moral and religious duty to follow the dictates of God's will against the demands of government officials. In his words,

Today I feel that God motivates me to use my whole being to combat by nonviolent means the ever-growing racial tension in the United States; at the same time the State directs that I shall do its will; which of these dictates can I follow—that of God or that of the State? Surely I must at all times attempt to obey the law of the State. But when the will of God and the will of the State conflict, I am compelled to follow the will of God. If I cannot continue in my vocation, I must resist.¹³

In this statement Rustin expresses the religious ethical basis of his decision and asserts that he must disobey the command of the state. Quite simply, Rustin rebuffs the state's claim on his life. Crucially, we should observe that here Rustin is not making an argument against war. Instead, his argument at this point goes to whether an individual has a moral duty to obey a given command of the state, irrespective of the content of the command. In particular, Rustin denies that the state may interfere with his religious vocation: he would not be able to combat racial tension if he were to follow the will of the state. Especially interesting, in the text just quoted, Rustin rests his draft resistance solely on his personal (subjective) religious experience: "I feel that God motivates me." Rustin passionately intimates that God "motivates *him*" to use "his whole being" to combat racial tension. It is maximally personal, private, or subjective insofar as one can only know for oneself what God has called one to do. This constitutes Rustin's testimony on his relationship with God and a declaration of the implications of that relationship for his status as citizen or subject of the state.

The careful reader might have noticed an additional noteworthy point in the above passage. Rustin relates that he must at "all" times endeavor to obey the law. Rustin's inclusion of this proposition indicates that Rustin's disobedience is based not on an *a priori* rejection of political obligation, but on an *a posteriori* assessment of the situation. In principle, we might say, not only does Rustin not oppose "obeying the law of the State," he takes himself to have an obligation to do so. That said, it is not a deeply held commitment and the implications of this expressed obligation must be minimal. Indeed, the proposed moral obligation to obey has little bearing on Rustin's actions. And given his religious convictions and his conception of the territorial state, conflicting demands on his allegiance were perhaps inevitable. As I implied above, radical pacifists typically regard the territorial state as an entity that relies upon violence and nationalism for its maintenance. In this way radical pacifists typically follow Tolstoy. And Rustin in the 1940s was hardly different.

This becomes especially clear in the closing of his "Letter to the Draft Board," where Rustin appeals to what we might think of as public or at least religious-communal norms. That is, Rustin provides scriptural, ontological, and pragmatic reasons to explain his disobedience:

The Conscription Act denies brotherhood—the most basic New Testament teaching. Its design and purpose is to set men apart—German against American, American against Japanese. Its aim springs from a moral impossibility—that ends justify means, that from unfriendly acts a new and friendly world can emerge.¹⁴

He concludes with an emphatic declaration: "That which separates man from his brother is evil and must be resisted."¹⁵

As should be clear, the grounds that Rustin enunciates here are unlike those considered above. First there is an empirical/ontological claim built into a particular interpretation of the New Testament: the state's conscription act represents a denial of "brotherhood" (human connectedness) and thereby violates (or denies the truth of) New Testament teaching. It is not clear whether "brotherhood" is an already-present ontological fact (i.e. what Martin King Jr sometimes referred to "a fundamental dimension of reality") that must be acknowledged or an aspiration, a normative ideal that must be sought after. Either way, Rustin claims that the "design and purpose" of the laws of the state deliberately set persons apart on the basis of nationality and race. The territorial state (as nation-state) therefore "separates man from his brother."

Because the state makes war and war sows discord between peoples, by definition, on Rustin's terms, the state is evil and thus must be resisted. This connects to Rustin's statement on means and ends; Rustin challenges a premise that he takes to be implicit in the arguments for resorting to war. In basic terms, he repudiates consequentialism as a moral theory and rejects the rationality of war: ends do not, for Rustin, justify means and war cannot cultivate conditions of peace. In this concise line Rustin articulates a central thesis of radical pacifism, the inseparability of means and ends, combining practical and principled reasons for opposition to war.

We have before us a clear account of Rustin's radical pacifism and how it relates to his conception of political authority and obligation. His resistance was based on (1) religious experience and his feeling about God's desire, (2) scriptural teachings, (3) an ontological or normative claim about the oneness of humanity ("brotherhood"), and (4) a rejection of war as a viable way to bring about a morally desirable end.¹⁶ These are related-yet-distinct reasons for disobeying the commands of the state and they can independently motivate distinct varieties of anarchism.

One might object at this point, doubting whether the refusal, the skeptic might say "mere" refusal, to obey draft laws is enough to warrant classifying a person as an anarchist. Several things can be said by way of answering such skepticism. But most importantly, I believe that this objection hinges in part on a certain understanding of what it means to be an anarchist and in part on a failure to carefully consider the character of the territorial state as a social institution. The former and the latter, of course, interrelate in significant ways, which is exactly why I have emphasized the value of analyzing sociopolitical activism in precise political philosophical terms.

In particular, I have suggested that when we speak of anarchism, we should focus on anarchism as a political philosophical thesis about political authority and political obligation. Further, I have suggested that there is a limited range of normative postures that one can assume in relation to the modern territorial state, particularly the state's claims regarding its own sovereignty and authority—sovereign authority. Keeping in mind the

stipulated definition of anarchism that I have presented and concentrating on the territorial state's claims as to its own authority is essential to the task of wholly appreciating the political implications of Rustin's draft resistance and politically or morally motivated disobedience broadly speaking.

Radical pacifists have often commended this way of approaching an analysis of radical sociopolitical action. Consistent with this, my claim that we should employ stipulated definitions and keep in mind the character of the state is supported by World War I conscientious objector Evan W. Thomas in a letter that he wrote to sociologist Clarence Marsh Case discussing the political philosophy underlying the actions of World War I objectors. Thomas (using the term "philosophical anarchism" in looser or less precise terms than most contemporary theorists) argues that draft resistance "generally leads to philosophical anarchism." Thomas contends,

Among the real "non-resistants" [*sic*] there is naturally a strong tendency to repudiate the agency of the sovereign state. This is a natural outcome of their philosophy of passive resistance, and where the individual is clear headed enough to think through the implications of his position and adopt a political philosophy it generally leads to philosophical anarchism in some form or another.¹⁷

To appreciate why Thomas's description is apt and applies well to Rustin we should consider the character of political and legal obligation as a general matter. At a basic level, there are perhaps only two ways in which one may comply with the law: one may comply with laws either based upon the source of those laws, that is, content-independent reasons for obedience, or based upon the substance of those laws, that is, content-dependent reasons for obedience. In the latter case, content-dependence, whether one complies with a law *depends* on the *content* of that law. Rustin's political philosophy entails a rejection of the idea that persons have moral obligations to obey the laws or commands of the state or political authority simply based on the source of those laws or commands. Rustin's "Letter to the Draft Board" betrays a content-dependent orientation to the law of the territorial state. Again, to reiterate, Rustin refuses to comply with the territorial state's commands for two distinct reasons. First, he refuses based on a contention about the responsibilities that flow from his vocational calling; so, he says, "If I cannot continue my vocation, I must resist." Second, Rustin resists the American territorial state because its practice of engaging in nationalistic wars violates what Rustin regards as universally applicable divine law or moral law.

In refusing to comply with the Selective Service Act, Rustin rejects the idea that one must adhere to a given law owing solely to its source (with the exception, perhaps, of the divine source). To be clear, this does not mean that one such as Rustin will always act in ways that violate the law. For

there might sometimes be nonmoral (practical) reasons to obey given laws and one may adhere to the dictates of laws owing to one's own embrace of the moral principles informing a given law. But it is critical to recognize that in such a case one obeys not the law as such but acts in a way that does not contravene the law. That is, for the agent in question, from the first-personal perspective, the law is not itself a reason for action.¹⁸ More to the point, a person who refuses to obey laws based simply on the source of the law denies that the political authority in question has a right to issue commands that an individual has a duty to obey.

A person who adopts this view denies the legitimacy of the political authority in question and denies that there is a moral duty to obey the law. On my view, these two overlapping yet different claims are sufficient grounds on which to classify a person as an anarchist, minimally speaking. Again, as has been noted in previous chapters, a person who only accepts these two claims is typically regarded as a *weak* (or philosophical) anarchist rather than a *strong* (or political) anarchist. Both the former and the latter deny that there is a moral duty to obey the law and so deny that the territorial state possesses legitimate authority. What differentiates the two kinds of anarchist is that strong anarchists contend that there is a duty to withdraw support from existing states while mere weak anarchists do not.

To make this distinction between weak anarchism and strong anarchism clearer, we can think about it in terms of how moral motives and moral intentions factor into a given agent's political disobedience. The motivational question is: on the basis of what reason or set of reasons does one not comply with the law or political command? The intentional question is: when one disobeys a law or a political command, for what end, or with what objectives in mind, does one disobey? In relation to Rustin's draft resistance, the intentional question goes to the issue of the aim or objective of the political disobedience. The interplay of the questions of motivation and intention inform or underlie most classifications of political disobedience into types and I believe that the strong anarchist and the weak anarchist are in part moved by the same motives while operating with different intentions. Strong anarchism can easily be defined in terms of a moral agent's intention(s): a strong anarchist is one who *intends* to undermine or eliminate the territorial state.

Several interrelated reasons support attributing strong anarchism to Rustin qua Gandhian pacifist and draft resister, even though he never claimed that he wanted to eliminate the territorial state as such. To begin, one purpose of an ethical case study such as this one is to clarify the social and theoretical implications of particular kinds of religiously and ethically motivated social action. Central to analysis of social action is the task of interpretation; and such interpretation is about explication and explanation. Engaging in second order reflection on social thought and action is instructive in part because, with the benefit hindsight and the time to reflect, it makes it possible to

render explicit what was perhaps merely implicit for the actors in question. This is especially the case with respect to ethical norms. As Jeffrey Stout notes,

There is more than one way of coming to a norm. The most obvious ways are by acknowledging it, explicitly through avowals or implicitly in action. But I can also be committed to a norm that follows from other commitments I have made. When I acknowledge a normative commitment, it directly implies other commitments, which I implicitly undertake, whether I am aware of it or not.¹⁹

With this fact about the nature normative commitment(s) in mind, to make sense of Rustin's ethics, it behooves us to consider both the philosophical and practical social implications of his explicitly held normative commitments.

Now, any conclusion that we draw about what is implied by Rustin's explicit commitments will be based on an interpretation and concomitant assertion or argument about the expected consequences of his intentional actions or the actions that he commended. (The persuasiveness or sufficiency of this interpretation will undoubtedly be predicated on the degree to which we are able to furnish reasons in support of the given interpretation.) Insofar as we are confident that a given explicitly held normative commitment implies some other commitment(s) and agree that the implication is clear, then there are grounds on which to attribute a given intention to the agent in question. In this way, we sometimes reach conclusions about what a given moral agent intended based on what we take to be the clear implications of that person's action or the action that the person commends.

In the present case, this points back to the above discussion about the nature of the territorial state as a social institution. Since we are here interested in whether Rustin's ethical commitments imply a rejection of a particular institution with a specific set of institutional practices, in order to make sense of the implications of Rustin's religious-ethical commitments, it is imperative that we consider them in relation to particular social practices and institutions, namely state practices.

The precise character of the modern state or state practices is undoubtedly controversial, which certainly complicates my analysis. Yet it is difficult to deny that a distinctive feature of the modern territorial state is its assertion of the right to force persons to kill other persons or to provide (monetary) means, in the form of taxes, to support institutionalized violence, that is, war. It is also clear that modern territorial states assert a right to designate persons as enemies who are susceptible to intentional physical harm and killing. I take these facts for granted and it should be evident that these features of modern state practice are critical for our analysis. As we have seen, Rustin maintains that there is a religious duty to strive to make war

impossible (by defying the state). Insofar as one concedes that a distinctive mark of the modern state is its reliance on armed force, it should be easy to see why the universal acceptance of pacifism—with the war resistance and the tax refusal that it entails—would spell the end of the modern territorial state. That is, I would submit that in practice, if everyone were to follow Rustin's example, then the territorial state could not survive. As Paul Kahn points out in, *Sacred Violence*, his work on sovereignty and torture:

The state . . . extends just as far as citizens are willing to die for the maintenance of sovereignty. Where the willingness to sacrifice ends, the border has been breached. The person who denies the state the right to demand sacrifice is, for this reason, cast as the enemy of the state. He has committed an act of treason from the state's point of view. He has effectively declared war on the state . . . for without the willingness to sacrifice the state cannot survive.²⁰

Thus in rejecting war and *intending* to undermine territorial states' ability to execute their war plans, Gandhians and radical pacifist war resisters (implicitly) aim/intend to undermine the modern territorial state. It is in the light of this that Rustin's radical pacifism *implies* a rejection of the modern state as such and clearly involves creating friction meant to stop the machine, to put it in Thoreauvian terms. We can therefore say that Rustin's religiously motivated pacifism is a source of strong anarchism.

This is a strong claim, yet I think that it is a fair accounting of radical pacifism. And Rustin seemed to recognize this, which makes sense. He had, after all, closely read Garrison and Tolstoy, who both insisted that "Christianity, properly understood, does not merely deny the legitimacy of the modern state; it destroys its very foundations." Perhaps Rustin had Tolstoy in mind when he used to joke about how if you scratch a pacifist, then you get an anarchist. With this joke in mind, in the final analysis, Rustin determined that he could not in good faith be the kind of pacifist who had to be committed to the elimination of the state.

A virtue of the analysis in this chapter is that it makes explicit the radical implications of absolute pacifism and so brings to the surface the reasons that radical pacifism is a difficult position to maintain without contradiction, tension, or compromise. As we might expect, Rustin's commitment to an unconditional or absolute principle of nonviolence was constantly in tension with some of his other values. This is especially apparent in Rustin's activism for economic and racial justice in the American domestic sphere.

I have for analytical purposes separated Rustin's war resistance from his activism in other domains. At this point it is appropriate to turn to Rustin's justifications of political disobedience as a response to economic oppression

and racial apartheid. In the following section we will see that Rustin maintains an exacting commitment to political disobedience, protest, or direct action (three terms that I will for the most part use interchangeably); and he argues for the use of direct action to combat racial injustice and the problem of militarism—the war economy, imperialism/neocolonialism, the Cold War arms race, and proxy wars.

Although Rustin clearly rejects certain claims about the legitimacy of the political authority of territorial states and the related political obligations that are said to arise in the light of that authority, a close analysis of his essays on political and civil disobedience in relation to racial and economic oppression reveals an important ambiguity or ambivalence in Rustin's thought. Similar to the moment in "Letter to the Draft Board," where he suggests that one must always endeavor to abide by the law, in some of his statements on political disobedience, Rustin suggests that his disobedience is aimed at improving "the nature of [the American] government." Further, Rustin often mentions the necessity of territorial state power for realizing just social conditions.

A tension lingers in Rustin's thought throughout the 1940s and 1950s. And the ambiguity extant in Rustin's thought is most evident when he is discussing the role of political disobedience as a means to combat economic and racial oppression. However, when combined with his radical pacifism, Rustin's argument that individuals have no duty to follow commands that contradict God's will and his contention that persons bear a duty to disobey the unjust directives of the state is consistent with a commitment to strong anarchism, even though Rustin sometimes suggests that disobedience should be in service of a standing state. So, as we turn to his essays and speeches about political disobedience in relation to economic and racial justice, we should bear in mind the fact that, during the period in question, Rustin was a (if not "the") leading proponent of Gandhian nonviolence and an uncompromising radical pacifist.

II

Just as Rustin was heading to jail for his war resistance, he had been heading up the March on Washington Movement with A. Philip Randolph, in an attempt to bring Gandhian nonviolence to the United States so as to bring down racial apartheid.²¹ Once released from prison in 1946, Rustin resumed his nonviolent praxis, rejoining FOR as a race relations secretary. Indeed, in April of 1947, approximately one year after being released from federal prison for his draft resistance, Rustin was arrested for his participation in the Journey of Reconciliation, a direct action campaign challenging segregated public transportation in the South that CORE spearheaded with

the support of FOR and the WRL. Rustin would spend three weeks on a North Carolina chain gang for his defiance of Jim Crow laws during the Journey of Reconciliation.

Appropriately, an issue that Rustin addresses consistently during the 1940s and 1950s is the role of nonviolent direct action and political disobedience for activists concerned with combating injustice. As a general matter, in the relevant essays of the period, Rustin professes that an individual is under no obligation, religious or moral, to comply with the state when doing so contributes to injustice. Rustin explains the function of civil disobedience in the 1948 essay "Civil Disobedience, Jim Crow, and the Armed Forces":

Civil disobedience against caste is not merely a right but a profound duty. Civil disobedience is urged not to destroy the United States but because the government is now poorly organized to achieve democracy. The aim of such a movement always will be to improve the nature of the government, to urge and counsel resistance to military Jim Crow in the interest of a higher law—the principle of equality and justice upon which real community and security depend.²²

Rustin's is an exacting ethic: one has not merely a right but a duty to disobey unjust social arrangements—caste. And to be sure, Rustin's claim is hardly an instance of rhetorical flourish. When he asserts that civil disobedience is a duty, we most certainly understand that he is actually committed to the duty himself. We thus understand that in practice he stands against the claim that there is a (binding) moral obligation to comply with the law merely because it is law promulgated by the territorial state.

Notice as well the source to which Rustin attributes the duty to disobey caste. In the above, he bases the duty to disobey on "higher law" as such rather than on scriptural authority. Although he does not at any point make clear what the exact relationship of the higher law is to God's law, given the centrality of the idea of the "brotherhood of humanity" in Rustin's thought, we might assume that insofar as Rustin understands the higher law and God's law, as expressed in the New Testament, to give primacy to brotherhood, they share an identity. As such, to a degree, whether based on God's law or the higher law, the consequences are the same: an individual who cares to act rightly, from a moral vantage, must act in accordance with the principle of justice and equality, which is synonymous with the quest for "brotherhood." This can be stated in other terms. One can be said to have a duty to comply with the higher law; and the aspect of the higher law that is relevant is the principle of justice and equality. In practice this means that one must oppose caste (with one's whole being). Rustin's activism during the 1940s and 1950s targeted caste and division in various forms—racial, economic, social—and he insists that individuals have a duty to oppose caste, even unto death.

Rustin's anticaste ethos is instantiated in his explication of the relevant content of the higher law that he invokes. Notice that he refers to the principle of "justice and equality" rather than to the principle of "justice" and the principle of "equality." He seems to be suggesting that justice is equality. Equality is of course the positive state of affairs that Rustin juxtaposes with caste, that is, a hierarchically and horizontally divided society. Caste rends the fabric of community—it obstructs or opposes justice. Rustin's emphasis on social equality is a factor that conditions his normative political position and his understanding of the role of the state in society. This became increasingly important in Rustin's later years, as we will see shortly. But to an extent the effect of his conception of equality on his understanding of the role of the state is already on display in the above, where he asserts that the principle of justice and equality is the value that government ought to serve. And this principle of justice and equality is democracy. But when Rustin invokes the term democracy he is not talking about a form of government. For him, a government is not itself a democracy. Rather it is an entity that ought to cultivate democracy. This might appear an odd formulation, yet it registers an important nuance. It allows Rustin to contend that government should be an instrument for democracy. Thus government, for Rustin, is an instrumental value and thus subordinate to human needs.

Understanding that government is subordinate to the quest for justice and equality on Rustin's view is crucial in that it helps us appreciate his position regarding the objective of social action and the appropriate posture that an activist ought to take vis-à-vis the territorial state. Political disobedience, properly understood, is motivated by an interest in serving a higher law and that law is not identical with the positive laws of the territorial state. The individual's duty is to serve the principle of justice and equality, not the state. Rustin's rigorous ethical theory requires fidelity to the moral (higher) law even when the behavior in question violates the positive laws of the state. This is a commitment that he never abandons.

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s he emphasizes the practical indispensability of direct action and political disobedience and stresses the merely instrumental value of government and formal democratic procedure. His tone is perhaps at its sharpest in the 1956 essay, "New South . . . Old Politics." Invoking stridently militant rhetoric, Rustin announces that,

The fight for the ballot is integral to the revolt against oppression . . . [But] when the Negro comes back from the polls he must face problems that cannot be solved by voting. Northern Negroes have had the right to vote for years without gaining economic or social equality. The same is true of most working [class] men, regardless of color. More often than not, reliance on voting in periodic elections has sidetracked them from using the more powerful weapons of direct action.²³

Because the descriptive and evaluative terms that we invoke in our social analysis register a diagnosis and signal our prescription, it makes a difference whether we call for revolt or reform or describe certain hierarchical social relations as the just outcome of a fair process or the product and sign of oppression; it makes a difference whether we call for voter registration drives or advocate closing down cities, making democracy in the streets. Rustin's rhetorical moves in the above situate him squarely in the nonviolent direct action tradition, a tradition that casts aside principled arguments for formal democratic procedure such as voting. In accord with this, Rustin insists that the dispossessed ought to employ direct action or political disobedience in their revolt against oppression, in the effort to overcome racial and economic caste. Reminiscent of Thoreau, Rustin suggests that one must vote with one's whole being against oppression, not leaving the issue of justice to the electoral process. Specifically, Rustin presents principled grounds for rejecting the moral duty to obey the law and pragmatic reasons for political disobedience and direct action.

Our analysis thus far has made it clear that during the 1940s and 1950s Rustin rejects a reliance on formal democratic procedure, maintains a commitment to radical pacifism, and does not (yet) explicitly articulate a positive role for the state in the liberation of oppressed peoples. Given his radical pacifism and the other two just noted factors, again, it is reasonable to classify Rustin as a strong anarchist during the period between his draft resistance and the end of the 1950s. To be sure, drawing this conclusion would be more complicated if Rustin had renounced his radical pacifism before the 1960s. Since I have said that a strong anarchist must intend to undermine or eliminate the state, Rustin's suggestion, even if only in passing, that the objective of civil disobedience is to improve the nature of a given government might be taken as a rejection of any intent to undermine or eliminate the state. The fact is, though, that Rustin remained a strident radical pacifist during the phase that I have concentrated on thus far and in my view this position commits Rustin to strong anarchism.

Particularly important to my rationale on this point is my understanding of the importance of the respective theories of the state that orient the activism of radical pacifists. To bring the most relevant aspect of this theory to the fore, radical pacifists can be contrasted with nonpacifist leftists such as racial and economic justice activists. As a practical matter, I think that it is accurate to say that few radical pacifists believe that the territorial state can itself play a positive role in the elimination of the causes of war and injustice broadly speaking. Yet, racial and economic justice advocates often believe that the state can play a positive role. This is true of reformers and revolutionaries alike. We might say that radical pacifists are thus absolutely alienated from the territorial state whereas nonpacifist reformers and revolutionaries are often alienated yet not to the same degree. The upshot is

that radical pacifists are committed to the elimination of the state as a way to eradicate certain social problems whereas radical racial and economic justice activists are often committed to the use of the state (apparatus) to eliminate social problems.

Now, one who takes the use of military force or the fact of political violence to be the major problem confronting humanity will likely either argue for the development of international mechanisms to limit the use of force or will seek to undermine (by way of grassroots activism) the state's ability to practice war. Either way, both the former and the latter are likely to regard the state in its present form as an evil institution that it is best to abolish. Persons who believe that racial injustice—particularly discriminatory racism—is the fundamental social evil or injustice will often regard the territorial state as a part of the solution. The same is true of a large number of democratic socialists who consider economic injustice to be a major problem. These latter two groups can envision the territorial state itself remaining more or less intact and the social conditions that they identify as problematic being eradicated or at least greatly improved, which differentiates such persons from radical pacifists in a way that is important for my concern to classify certain positions in political philosophical terms.²⁴

Again, in the analysis of radical pacifism I noted that radical pacifists reject political violence, especially war; because war is so fundamental to the functioning of the modern territorial state, I argued that rejecting war means rejecting the modern territorial state; I have maintained that such a position is best regarded as strong anarchism. We will discover in what follows that Rustin no longer belongs to the radical pacifist contingent by 1965.

During the 1960s Rustin's political philosophy underwent a significant shift. Events pulled him increasingly into the civil rights movement, which eventually led him to downplay his radical pacifist commitments. For as his involvement in the civil rights movement takes center, and he begins to reflect at length on the social situation confronting African Americans, and the poor generally, he begins to make explicit and central the view that state power is necessary for the liberation of the oppressed. Ultimately, in approximately 1965, he renounced his radical pacifism and relinquished his position on the editorial board of the leftist journal *Liberation*, which he had helped Muste found in 1956. So by the mid-1960s Rustin did not advocate principles that committed him (even if only implicitly) to the position that an individual has a duty to seek the *elimination* of the state; during the later phase, then, it is inappropriate to categorize him as a strong anarchist. Yet, even after this shift, Rustin remains adamant about the fact that individuals bear no moral duty to comply with the state.

In the following sections, I turn to Rustin's social philosophy as it developed during the 1960s, allowing his draft resistance and his theory

about the proper role of political disobedience for social justice activists to serve as a background for our discussion of his commitments during the 1960s and 1970s, with the goal of understanding the reasons for Rustin's shift and determining how a commitment to political disobedience should be classified, as a political philosophical matter, when not combined with radical pacifism. The major question going forward is: Can the later Rustin still be understood as holding views that imply a variety of anarchism?

III

In 1956 the modern civil rights movement picked up momentum. The Montgomery Bus Boycott that began in late 1955 electrified activists from one corner of the globe to another. Mass protest had arrived as a tool of Negroes in the quest to get free. Rustin had been waiting for such a moment since the late 1930s when he enrolled as a full-time nonviolent freedom fighter. Having given so much of his energy to developing nonviolent direct action, it only made sense that Rustin would be among the most important outsiders sent down South by the WRL to support the work of the Montgomery Improvement Association. As it began, many hoped that the bus boycott would serve as a catalyst for activities elsewhere. Yet few anticipated that soon enough the names *Montgomery*, *Parks*, *King* would in fact take on world historical significance. Before long, the civil rights movement was shaking the foundations of the Southern social order. Before long, Rustin was organizing the March on Washington, and Martin Luther King Jr was accepting a Nobel Peace award. When Rustin ventured to Montgomery in 1956, he was a tested activist caught up in the whirlwind of revolt, as it is so often said of the central players in major social movements and revolutions—he was pulled from the margins to the center.

Much has been made of the transformation that Rustin underwent in the 1960s. Figures such as Bob Moses, Staughton Lynd, Tom Hayden, and David Dellinger have suggested that Rustin emerged as a part of the liberal establishment. His entrée into circles of power, it is said, undermined his radical impulse. His unbending support for Johnson and campaigning for Hubert Humphrey in 1968 are cited as evidence. And his apparent reluctance to protest against the Vietnam War coupled with his consistent criticism of the New Left, including leaders of Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), is regarded as further proof. There is no doubting that Rustin underwent a shift. However, the question as to what caused the shift and what the substance of the shift entailed is an entirely separate matter.

The successes of the civil rights movement called into question several of the assumptions that had oriented Rustin's activism in the years leading up to

the movement. It fundamentally transformed his sense of what was possible in America. In particular, having organized the March on Washington in 1963, Rustin regarded it as possible to build a progressive multiracial political majority that could revolutionize American society. In droves white Americans from all over the country flooded the Mall in Washington DC, standing side-by-side with Negroes, demanding the inclusion of Negroes as full-fledged American citizens. Add to this Lyndon B. Johnson's commitment to racial and economic justice. For the first time in his life, in the year after the March on Washington, Rustin began to believe that it would be possible to transform America via the formal electoral process. It appeared as though the visions of Tom Watson, Norman Thomas, and A. Phillip Randolph were finally possible: a multiracial electoral majority ushering in a socioeconomic revolution. This revelation greatly impacted Rustin's social and political philosophy.

Rustin had been at the forefront of radical pacifist activism for decades. During the 1930s through the 1950s his thought and actions exemplified those of an absolute pacifist. Particularly important, for radical pacifists, and thus ostensibly the younger Rustin, means and ends are so radically intertwined that reflecting on one means meditating on the other, so that to alter one's means betrays an implicit intent to change one's ends. And for Gandhian activists political action involved seeking to change opponent's "hearts." Rustin departed from the Gandhian pacifist fold as he gave more of his energy and attention to civil rights activism. Effectuating the desired social change would require giving more weight to the consequences of political actions and this would mean focusing on interests and not hearts. Action could only be recommended if it led to the realization of observable concrete objectives, and for Rustin it was imperative for political actors to avoid confusing means and ends. This increased concern for nearer term consequences of a given action indicates or signals Rustin's move toward a more pragmatic approach to social action. Rustin's stridently pragmatic orientation distinguishes him from many twentieth-century radicals and has led to the classification of Rustin as a political conservative. However, this is a label that does not quite work. As we will see shortly, even as he announced the need for a shift in the means employed by movement activists, Rustin called for revolutionary transformation of political economy and the democratization of the mode of economic production. Rustin was no conservative.

But let me be clear. I turn to this phase of Rustin's activist career neither to vindicate him nor his staunchest critics. As is so often the case, a portion of the truth rests on both sides of the line. Rustin biographers Anderson, Levine, and D'Emilio all wonderfully capture the debate that estranged Rustin from many leftists. My reasons for turning to this phase are multifold. First doing so will allow us to reflect on the implications of certain ethical principles for other ethical principles and values. As social circumstances change, strategic

choices often bring into full view a host of tensions that were previously obscured. As one makes choices in the light of those tensions, often, what one values more or most comes to the fore.

With Rustin, events in the 1960s thrust to the surface several important tensions and analyzing Rustin's position as it developed during the civil rights movement, especially after the passage of the Civil Rights and Voting Rights acts, puts into focus the way in which holding certain values requires relinquishing others. Here the concern is with the implications of certain values in relation to pacifism and anarchism and the consequences of Rustin's shift for his normative conception of political authority or political obligation and the role of political violence in social life. Earlier, I argued that Rustin was a strong anarchist in what we might refer to as the early and middle stages of his activist career, owing to his embrace of radical pacifism. The task here is to come to terms with the reasons for and the political philosophical upshot of his abandonment of radical pacifism.

As we tend to Rustin's intellectual work during the 1960s and 1970s, we will be considering the moves that he makes against the background that has been provided by the analysis of Dorothy Day in Chapter 2. Day's anarchism flowed from her absolute pacifism and her concern about the deleterious effects that the rise of the territorial state as a centralized welfare bureaucracy had on human communities and for human persons *qua* moral agents. While it would be untrue to say outright that Rustin is unconcerned with the problem of bureaucratic centralization, it is certainly true that such issues are for him of secondary importance at best, which is a fact that a consideration of Rustin's call for a shift from protest to politics will make clear.

In arguing for a move from protest to politics Rustin is guided by three basic commitments: (1) his preference for class-based sociopolitical mobilization; (2) his belief in the necessity of a centralized state; and (3) his embrace of electoral politics. This can be restated in negative terms. Rustin rejected: (1) race-based politics; (2) a reliance on protest; and (3) localism, decentralization, or privileging participatory democracy. The adoption of positions (2) and (3) is significant in that Rustin's embrace of formal politics and a state-centered view of social change is inconsistent with strong anarchism. Yet, the fact that Rustin, even in his later years, did not reject the moral legitimacy of political disobedience means that it might still be instructive to describe Rustin as a weak anarchist.

I will conclude this chapter with a reflection on this undoubtedly controversial issue. In particular, I will argue the following: (1) One strand of anarchism, weak (or philosophical) anarchism, allows for some support of the state. (2) Advocating for perpetual political disobedience entails a commitment to (a strand of) anarchism, namely weak anarchism. (3) Rustin, in his late phase, explicitly noted the necessity of a strong state for the realization of certain desirable social changes. (4) But even in the later phase

Rustin retained a commitment to political disobedience. (5) Therefore, the later Rustin is probably best regarded as a weak anarchist. This issue is quite significant for students of African American studies, American religion and politics, social justice movements, descriptive ethics, normative ethics, and political philosophy. My sense is that weak anarchism is a conception of the individual's relation to the territorial state that jibes with the philosophical commitments of a larger number of persons than is typically appreciated. It behooves us to make explicit this rejection of a certain conception of political authority or legitimate political authority, and thus point, on the one hand, to why African American radicals might eschew strong anarchism yet revel, on the other hand, in the weak anarchist mode.

IV

Rustin's shift must be contemplated in relation to the advancements made during the modern American civil rights movement. The Southern movement's two phases had proved effective: the mass protests for public accommodations that had begun in the 1950s and the voter registration drives in Alabama and Mississippi culminated in the 1960s, and by 1965 it was clear that key figures and decision-makers of the American establishment were committed to eliminating race-supremacist legal categories and delegitimizing racism at a formal political level. Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the National Voting Rights Act in 1965. The fourteenth amendment would now be enforced. Jim Crowism, challenged for at least seven decades, had finally been defeated. With this, the modern civil rights movement had reached its apex. The advancements that it produced transformed American society and in turn greatly impacted the structure of the black freedom struggle, especially the theorizing about how to proceed in the light of the altered situation.

The familiar questions of contemporary social movements moved to the fore, as activists contemplated and debated how to sustain the movement in the light of changes. Which class of actors would keep the movement alive? Did that class need allies? Would it be only blacks or poor blacks and poor whites? What would they demand? Would they seek land or jobs or reparations or formal political power? How would they go about acting? Would they vote or march or shutdown cities or take up guerilla warfare? These questions were at the heart of the strategy-debate that ensued just after the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Rustin participated in this debate, contributing several important essays, and it is to the ideas that he presented during this liminal stage of the black freedom struggle that I would like to turn. These essays (and this stage of Rustin's career) shed light on aspects of Rustin's social and political philosophy that are pertinent to my effort to interpret him as an anarchist.

Perhaps the most important question that emerged during this phase of the black freedom struggle was the role that race played in American society. The presumption that state-sanctioned exclusion (social, political, and economic) on the basis of race constitutes the gravest defect of American society guided many participants of the modern civil rights movement. Rustin explicitly rejected a race-based view of society and maintained that the focus on race that such a view entails undermines the possibility of building a coalition that is capable of instigating desirable social reconstruction. In general, Rustin's conception of race parallels that of American Marxists and communists, who have tended to adopt reductive views of race, and so regard racial consciousness as essentially false consciousness that negatively impedes upon the ability to judge the situation for what it in fact is. Many Marxists consider race consciousness and racism as facts that need to be eliminated; but overcoming the former and the latter is viewed merely as a precondition to the revolutionary praxis that will cultivate the relevant class-consciousness. On this view, economic class-consciousness is a precondition to authentic or truly revolutionary action.

That Rustin's conception of race resembles this basic Marxist account is reflected in the 1971 essay, "The Blacks and the Unions," where Rustin plainly states that economic class is more important than race: "The prominent racial and ethnic loyalties that divide American society have, together with our democratic creed, obscured a fundamental reality—that we are a class society and, though we do not often talk about such things, that we are engaged in a class struggle."²⁵ Continuing this line of argumentation, in "Affirmative Action in an Economy of Scarcity," Rustin criticizes activists who focus on racial discrimination:

Everyone knows racial discrimination still exists. But the high rate of black unemployment and the reversal of hard-won economic gains . . . is a function of much broader economic failures; failures which, moreover, have left their mark on all Americans regardless of race . . . [As] long as inequality is treated as a product of racism [or racial prejudice], instead of economics, it will seriously direct the attention of society from difficult issues which must be tried.²⁶

Rustin's disapproval of race-based views of society is rooted in his belief that such views "obscure reality" such that one is unable to formulate a plan of action that might improve material conditions.

Rustin's claim may not appear radical. But it was quite controversial at the time and Rustin's position on the role of race in American society distanced him from two camps at once. First, it distanced him from persons who thought that the civil rights movement had successfully removed the most important impediment to the inclusion of blacks into major American social and political institutions. In addition, it set him apart from persons

who regarded the civil rights movement as primarily a black middle-class affair, both in terms of its principal leaders and in terms of its beneficiaries; according to this group, the civil rights movement did not address the major issues, namely social and cultural concerns, confronting the larger population of African Americans, especially the working poor and unemployed. James Farmer's trenchant criticism, expressed decades later, is characteristic of the latter group's perception of Rustin after the mid-1960s: "Bayard has no credibility in the black community. . . . Bayard's commitment is to labor, not to the black man. His belief that the black man's problem is economic, not racist, runs counter to black community thinking."²⁷

This issue about whether to focus on race or class is so controversial in part because of the implications that it has for political praxis. As we might expect, Rustin's class-based view of society undergirds his evaluation of the civil rights movement. Because Rustin did not regard racism per se as the principal source or cause of social injustice, he did not regard the defeat of Jim Crowism as an ultimate victory. On Rustin's view, the judicial decisions from the late 1930s through the 1960s eliminated or at least undermined the basis for racism as a formal legal matter. The Equal Accommodations and Civil Rights acts consolidated the transformation at the legislative level. This constituted progress, to be sure. Yet blacks had not reached the Promised Land simply because they could vote or because they could sit on juries. Similar to his mentor A. Phillip Randolph, Rustin put a premium on economic matters.

In "From Protest to Politics," focusing on the relative importance of legalized segregation, Rustin relates that, as far as he is concerned, the formal (Jim Crow) legal order was "relatively peripheral both to the American socioeconomic order and to the fundamental conditions of life of the Negro people."²⁸ He adds,

The Negro today finds himself stymied by obstacles of far greater magnitude than the legal barriers he was attacking before: automation, urban decay, de facto school segregation. These problems, while conditioned by Jim Crow, do not vanish upon its demise. They are more deeply rooted in our socioeconomic order; they are the result of the total society's failure to meet not only the Negro's needs, but human needs generally.²⁹

Rustin recognized the import of the economic revolution that materialized following the postwar boom of the 1950s and saw early on that many blacks were becoming "superfluous labor" on a nationwide scale for perhaps the first time since the arrival of blacks in the New World. That is, many blacks were no longer being exploited as a class of cheap labor; they were being excluded from the productive process altogether. Africans arrived in the Americas as servants and slaves, experiencing economic exploitation from the seventeenth century through the mid-twentieth. But technological

shifts and the movement of capital in the twentieth century had unleashed profound changes. The problem of economic marginalization had emerged, so that by the mid-1960s, blacks were experiencing unemployment at Great Depression-like rates. Addressing this problematic head-on, in "From Protest to Politics," Rustin observed, "This matter of economic role brings us to the greater problem—the fact that we are moving into an era in which the natural functioning of the market does not itself ensure for every man with will and ambition a place in the productive process."³⁰ With this concern in mind, he called for revolutionary changes to the system, arguing that American social institutions must be fundamentally transformed "to the point where social and economic structure . . . can no longer be said to be the same."³¹ This revolution would entail basically three things: programs for full employment, the eradication of ghettos, and the construction of new schools.

Unlike Dorothy Day, who advocated for decentralization, Rustin's assessment of the economic situation leads him to assert that there is a need for centralized governmental action—government intervention—since combating the problem of economic marginalization would require a fundamental reorganization of American society. This commitment to centralized government intervention situates Rustin within the class of activists that has been referred to as the Old Left. Barbara Epstein's contrast of "activists of the thirties" (i.e. the Old Left) with "activists of the sixties" (i.e. the New Left) is elucidative. In *Political Protest and Cultural Revolution*, Epstein intimates that "Unlike the activists of the thirties, who gravitated to the issues of political and economic power, the activists of the sixties tended to gravitate to what seemed more fundamental issues of how social life as a whole should be organized, what ideas it should be ruled by."³² Epstein's classificatory schema is based on an assumption about the formation of political identity along generational lines and is imperfect. After all, Rustin and Day were leading activists of both the 1930s and the 1960s. But if we focus on the substantive commitments of the groups that Epstein delineates, important light is shed on the issues that divided activists during the 1960s and 1970s.

As has already been suggested, Rustin was preoccupied with formal mechanisms of economic and political power (macrostructural institutions). This distinguishes him from new leftists who, at least as far as the standard account goes, eschewed the class analysis of the earlier leftists and generally shied away from developing concrete goals to orient political action. In accord with the standard account of the New Left, Rustin charged new leftists with lacking "programs"; they possessed no strategy for gaining economic or political power.

Rustin especially took issue with black power proponents (mainly "black separatists"), student activists (such as Students for a Democratic Society), and antiwar activists (i.e. the Weatherman Underground Organization) of

the late 1960s and 1970s. Rustin perceived the disparate contingents to have in common a fixation on culture and an unyielding commitment to participatory democracy. Particularly relevant for our purposes is Rustin's criticism of the localism and decentralization preferred by participatory democrats.

In "The Failure of Black Separatism" [1970], Rustin complains that the period was one of great social confusion for activists. Activists were confused not only "about the strategies that should be [adopted], but about the very goals the strategies were supposed to bring" into fruition. Particularly problematic in Rustin's view was the fact that "progressive whites" and "black militants" had begun to doubt whether realizing "racial and economic justice would require expanding the role of the federal government." He criticized such activists for suggesting that "government has gotten too big and that what is needed to make the society more humane and livable is an enormous new move toward local participation and decentralization."³³ A long quote from "The Failure of Black Separatism" betrays Rustin's concerns and the spirit of his criticisms of participatory democrats:

The new anti-integrationism and localism have been motivated by sincere moral conviction, but hardly by intelligent political thinking. It should be obvious that what is needed today more than ever is a political strategy that offers the real possibility of economically uplifting millions of impoverished individuals, black and white. Such a strategy must of necessity give low priority to the various forms of economic and psychological experimentation that I have discussed, which at best deal with issues peripheral to the problem and at worst embody a frenetic escapism. These experiments are based on the assumption that the black community can be transformed from within when, in fact, any such transformation must depend upon structural changes in the entire society. We need, therefore, a new national economic policy. . . . A successful strategy, therefore, must rest upon an identification of those central institutions which, if altered sufficiently, would transform the social and economic relations in our society; and it must provide a politically viable means of achieving such an alteration.³⁴

In short, Rustin focuses on macrostructural analysis and recommends centralized top-down measures or a program of national planning. In other words, he proposes that centralized institutions be deployed in order to transform the entire society. That Rustin supports centralized national planning is an effect of what he takes to be the most pressing problem facing society, and by extension it is an expression of what he understands a viable solution to entail.

Rustin's normative support of centralization clearly distinguishes him from participatory democrats and other critics of the modern bureaucratic

state. Indeed, Rustin's criticism of the New Left reveals that his conception of the major problems confronting the modern person or the contemporary American stands in stark contrast to Dorothy Day's. In the end, Day probably has more in common with new leftists ("activists of the sixties") than with Rustin. Whereas Day's spiritual ethos leads her to bemoan the fragmentation of community wrought by industrialization, urbanization, and bureaucratization, Rustin is nearly silent on these issues. And Rustin rarely speaks to the problems of existential crisis, anomie, social alienation, cultural decay—the psycho-spiritual problematic.

Consistent with this, Rustin does not propose spiritual renewal, cultural criticism and expression, cooperative local economies, or communal living experiments as viable means by which to improve society; he does not recommend localism or decentralization as solutions to major social problems. Quite the contrary, he dismisses focus on these values and practices as counterproductive to liberation—economic liberation. Just as persons who focused on race offered an obscured account of "reality," persons who emphasized localism and decentralization inadequately grasped the causes of social injustice and blocked the way toward improved conditions. According to Rustin, new leftists neglected the importance of the state to economic liberation; they did not focus their attention on the appropriate strategy-question: how can power be seized?

V

Rustin provides his response to the above question in his 1965 essay "From Protest to Politics." Social change would come through formal political action. In short, Rustin thought that with the changes brought about by the direct action campaigns in the 1950s and early 1960s, protest had exhausted its efficacy and thus there was a need to turn to formal politics. Protest had been effective as a way to press for basic civil rights and formal political equality, but it could not be effectively employed in order to sufficiently transform the economic structure of the entire society. On Rustin's view, the capturing of formal political power, by the progressive left, constituted a precondition to the reconstruction of the socioeconomic order. To be clear, Rustin's turn to formal politics should not be taken as evidence of a conservative turn or as a reflection of a principled commitment to formal democratic procedure. Instead, Rustin's turn is best understood as flowing from his exacting commitment to social justice. His turn is primarily pragmatic.

To appreciate how this is so, we only need to ponder the debate that unfolded among Rustin, Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Toure), and Martin Luther King Jr. The three each believed that the defeat of Jim Crowism was important but insufficient. They all identified economic marginalization

as the major problem confronting African Americans. More to the point, Rustin, King, and Carmichael all regarded the *intersection* of poverty and race to be the chief problem confronting African Americans. On this mark they were ahead of others. But they disagreed about the proper place of nonviolent direct action and the role of multiracial coalitions.

From the time that King emerged as a contributor to the Montgomery Bus Boycott in late 1955 to his death in 1968, he maintained that it would be impossible to achieve the total liberation of blacks in America without employing nonviolent direct action. As it was, blacks had limited options at their disposal. In short, they could either: (1) passively accept the status quo; (2) proactively advocate for racial segregation; (3) seek change, but (a) reject violence and nonviolent direct action; (b) accept violence; or (c) reject violence and embrace nonviolent direct action. A handful of black power proponents, such as H. Rap Brown, and even Albert Cleage, inspired by the Cuban and Chinese revolutions, and events in places such as the Congo, believed that blacks should consider revolutionary violence. King of course dismissed such calls as asinine. That left formal politics or protest. In *Where Do We Go from Here*, King's final book-length manuscript, he explicitly rejects a reliance on the formal political process:

Many, especially in the North, argue that the maximum use of legislation, welfare and antipoverty programs has now replaced demonstrations, and that overt and visible protest should now be abandoned. Nothing could prove more erroneous than to demobilize at this point. It was the mass-action movement that engendered the changes of the decade, but the needs which created it are not yet satisfied. Without the will to unity and struggle Negroes would have no strength, and reversal of our successes could easily be effected. The use of the creative tensions that broke the barriers of the South will be as indispensable in the North to obtain and extend necessary objectives.³⁵

By "visible and overt protest," King meant massive nonviolent direct action. On King's view, realizing social justice would only be possible if persons were willing to extend the application of nonviolent direct action. Rustin and Carmichael, of course, disagreed with King's prescription. To Rustin and Carmichael the time had come to downplay direct action. Its utility had mostly been exhausted. Rustin and Carmichael agreed that it was time to devise a strategy that focused on formal electoral politics. But at the same time, the two disagreed intensely about whether activists should focus on local electoral politics or national electoral politics or whether political organizing efforts should or should not be primarily interracial.

It was during this phase of the black freedom struggle, of course, that Carmichael started talking about black power, a term which he is largely

responsible for popularizing, even though it had been employed by others well before the 1960s. Central to Carmichael's black power program was the idea of black self-determination. The path to this self-determination was said to lie in local politics. In accord with this, Carmichael encouraged blacks to concentrate on building racial solidarity so as to be in a position to capture control of political districts—and cities—where blacks constituted a majority of the population. Since blacks could not rely on “well-meaning” white Americans, according to Carmichael, it made more sense to devote attention to shoring up black solidarity. In other words, he thought that it was impractical to rely upon the support of white Americans.

Rustin, however, argued that local politics were important but insignificant as a means by which to refashion the political economy. Again, only the federal government could restructure the economy along the lines that Rustin envisioned; and to capture control of the territorial state would require a national majority. So, while Carmichael maintained that blacks must close ranks and should start a black political party and make the most of the geographic concentration of blacks, Rustin insisted that multiracial coalitional politics was central. As Rustin put it in “From Protest to Politics”: “The future of the Negro struggle depends on whether the contradictions of this society can be resolved by a coalition of progressive forces which becomes the *effective* political majority in the United States.”³⁶ Rustin felt that “a coalition of Negroes, labor, liberals, religious organizations, and students” could “form a majority capable of democratizing the economic, social, and political power of America.”³⁷ According to Rustin, it would be impossible to effectuate the necessary and desired social change in the absence of majority support: “The racial crisis . . . is not an isolated problem that lends itself to redress by a protesting minority. Being rooted in the very social and economic structure of the society, it can be solved only by a comprehensive program.”³⁸ Blacks had no choice but to rely upon progressive and working class white Americans. From the vantage of African Americans, who comprised only a minority segment of the US population, majority support meant multiracial support.

So, to reiterate, whereas black power proponent Stokely Carmichael argued that a consolidation of racial solidarity was essential to the quest of liberation, Rustin insisted that only multiracial electoral politics could bring about the needed social change. King, of course, also argued that African Americans needed to formulate a plan to broaden the civil rights coalition to include poor and working class whites and Mexicans. Therefore, King and Rustin agreed on the importance of a multiracial coalition. Yet whereas King maintained that an interracial coalition should be mobilized for direct action, Rustin thought that such a group's energy should be directed to the national electoral process.

In many respects, the above comparative analysis could be a bit more nuanced. I could certainly say more about each of the three figures that

I discussed. Yet, the above analysis has made clear the point that is most important for the purposes of this chapter. It should be clear that Rustin's account of the social situation during the 1960s moved him to argue that eradicating injustice would require building a coalition (means to penultimate end) large enough to capture hold of the state (penultimate end) and refashion the political economy (ultimate end of sociopolitical action). According to Rustin, capturing formal political power, that is, the state, constituted a precondition to the reconstruction of the socioeconomic order. It should also be clear that what was at issue in the debate in question was the anticipated effectiveness of rival strategies for social change and not the moral acceptability of political disobedience. Significantly, Rustin's embrace of electoral politics was pragmatic and did not substantially affect his understanding of the moral duties that an individual owes to the state. I will return to this point in the next section. For now, it is important to appreciate that while Rustin's turn does not bear on his understanding of political obligation, the turn does reflect Rustin's evolving or evolved understanding of the relevance of Gandhian nonviolence and pacifism to political activism, so that Rustin's turn to electoral politics does have major political philosophical implications.

To appreciate these implications, we must first recognize the fact that Rustin's belief that state power would be needed in order to establish and enforce new socioeconomic practices means that he can be said to value the territorial state as an instrument of social change. Indeed, Rustin's emphasis on the need for governmental action and his concomitant embrace of electoral politics entailed a rejection of absolute pacifism and constituted a decisive break from his commitment to Gandhian nonviolence, since, as is widely accepted, a distinctive feature of the modern state is its reliance on violence. Radical participatory democrats and absolute pacifists eschew state-centered paths to social change for precisely this reason. The former group typically relies on a pragmatic premise: a centralized authority cannot in practice bring about a social order with the desirable level of social freedom and equality. The latter group rejects state-centered paths to social change on the basis of principle: the norm of nonviolence precludes the acceptability of the seizure of state power. By the mid-1960s Rustin was too concerned with the immediate consequences of prioritizing localism or peace for the marginalized to make them the fundamental values guiding his political engagement.

To understand exactly how Rustin's reordered commitments relate to Gandhian nonviolence it is crucial to recall the basic account of Gandhian thought that was presented in the first sections of this chapter. I noted there that Gandhians assert that at least one immediate aim of political protest ought to be to change collective sentiments, through minimally coercive *moral* persuasion, so as to make possible new institutional practices. According to Gandhians, persons' hearts and moral priorities must be changed in order

to satisfactorily transform society or social institutions. As with Thoreau and the Transcendentalists, for Gandhians, self-reform is a precondition to meaningful social or political reform. For nearly three decades, from the mid-1930s up to the late 1950s, Rustin stood out as perhaps America's leading Gandhian. Yet, at some point during the 1960s, Rustin began doubting the viability of Gandhian theories of social change. By February of 1965, with the doubt in full bloom, Rustin was calling into question central Gandhian ideas. In particular, in the essay "From Protest to Politics," Rustin explicitly dismisses strategies based on appeals to conscience. Criticizing protest tactics that he found ineffective, Rustin announces, "hearts are not relevant to the issue; neither racial affinities nor racial hostilities are rooted there. It is institutions—social, political, and economic institutions—which are the ultimate molders of collective sentiments."³⁹

Rustin's reassessment of the political value of Gandhian nonviolence and pacifism is each an effect of, indicative of, and best understood in relation to his evolving theory of social change. As we might expect, his more than three-decade-long career as a community organizer had a notable effect on his working theory about how social justice movements can be cultivated and sustained. It is fair to say that by the mid-1960s, Rustin had for the most part begun to regard social movements as essentially large-scale interest-group actions. And not unlike other community organizers, Rustin eventually decided that a community organizer could only reasonably expect to successfully organize directly affected parties—that is, the oppressed—and a small number of nonaffected empathizers. Along these lines, Rustin often depicted the civil rights movement as primarily a movement centered on African Americans' shared interest in combating white supremacist practices and racial oppression. On this interpretation, the movement's successes stemmed in large part from the fact that it was a movement comprised of persons with clearly identifiable mutual material interests. Acting in concert, civil rights movement participants were able to force political and economic power-holding elites to cease perpetuating certain unjust social arrangements.

With this view of the movement in mind, arguing against appeals to conscience, Rustin insisted that activists should endeavor to inspire large-scale social action by appealing to the interests of potential movement participants. This, of course, relates to Rustin's increasing preoccupation with building a multiracial working class coalition. As we saw earlier in this chapter, by 1965 Rustin thought that a multiracial coalition among working class persons could actually be brought together based on shared material interests. Rustin's faith in the possibility of organizing a multiracial coalition was predicated on his understanding of what he referred to, after the Marxists, as the "objective situation."

Based on his interpretation of the "objective situation," Rustin could contend that it was in fact unnecessary (and impractical) to appeal to

conscience, since changed hearts were beside the point. What organizers and activists needed to do was to help people, namely workers, understand who their natural allies were. To Rustin it was clear. Persons suffering from economic deprivation, exploitation, and insecurity should, and could plausibly be expected to unite (around economic interests) in order to transform the entire social structure. And because inequality in the economic sphere is both the sign of unjust practices and constitutive of social injustice, the coalition to transform the socioeconomic structure would by definition be committed to social justice. Morality and prudence would coalesce.

In short, Rustin developed a view of the pertinence of material interests to social action that altered his sense of the relative importance of “changing hearts” and, quite naturally, this in turn conditioned the type of social action that he would prescribe. So, Rustin could maintain his commitment to Gandhian nonviolence as long as he believed that social action should focus on appealing to persons’ moral sentiments; and as long as he believed that peace or nonviolence, as a political matter, was more important than racial and economic justice. Yet as his involvement in the civil rights movement increased, Rustin accorded less weight to peace and began to emphasize institutional change more than individual conversions.

In this way, Rustin biographer Jervis Anderson is correct to relate that Rustin’s “role in the building of coalition politics had helped him to recognize that absolute pacifism was no longer effective.”⁴⁰ Absolute pacifism was no longer effective in the sense that Rustin believed that absolute pacifism would remain a minority position and thus could not constitute a viable basis for a sustainable social justice movement. Rustin’s involvement in the civil rights movement provided him with a new understanding of what social movements can attain and how they can attain it. Impressed with the scope, scale, and impact of the civil rights movement, Rustin had come to doubt pacifism’s political value. He had spent decades trying to inspire a peace movement, yet with limited effect. Pacifism had proven a hard idea to sell—a bit too hard.

Since one can be an absolute pacifist without being a Gandhian, it is notable that Rustin simultaneously embraced commitments that entailed giving up both Gandhian nonviolence and absolute pacifism. This points to an issue that it is essential to be clear about. On its own, Rustin’s altered understanding of the role of hearts and institutions entails breaking with Gandhian nonviolence, but it does not necessitate rejecting absolute pacifism.⁴¹ Indeed, an absolute pacifist might agree with Rustin about the primacy of institutions (over hearts) yet insist that persons focus on enacting alternative economic or educational practices—and not political practices per se—in order to undermine prevailing unjust institutional practices. In consequence, it is the particular type of institution, that is, a strong centralized state, that Rustin identified as necessary (in order to alter

social conditions and thus collective sentiments) that entailed a rejection of absolute pacifism.

In perhaps his most to the point statement about his reappraisal of pacifism, Rustin relates, "Whereas I used to believe that pacifism had a political value . . . I no longer believe that. I believe that pacifism is a personal witness to the truth as one sees it. I do not believe that pacifism can be politically organized."⁴² He continues, "It is ridiculous, in my view, to talk only about peace. There is something which is more valuable to people than peace. And that is freedom. So we have to find a peaceful way to defend democratic freedom."⁴³ As I indicated earlier, there had long been tension in Rustin's thought between his absolute pacifism and his commitment to racial and economic justice. We can now see that Rustin resolved this tension by giving up his absolute pacifism. According to Rustin, because "people" value freedom more than peace, pacifism cannot be organized politically, which means that responsible political actors should concentrate on creating institutions that preserve "democratic freedom."

In *Parting the Waters*, historian Taylor Branch tells of a notable exchange between Rustin and King at the beginning of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. During an intense conversation about the dictates of Gandhian nonviolence, Rustin had "quibbled" with King's initial reservations about embracing absolute pacifism. King, then a mere 26 years old, confessed to Rustin that he was "trying to practice nonviolence but did not subscribe to Muste-style [radical] pacifism." From King's perspective, "no just society could exist without at least a police power."⁴⁴

By 1965 Rustin and King had more or less traded places. By then, Rustin's radicalism had begun to congeal around his social democratic commitments, particularly his commitment to economic justice. On Rustin's view, the primary objective of social action should be the elimination of economic marginalization and exploitation (and the eradication of poverty). In particular, he presents economic equality as a goal that should orient social praxis. Leftists who propose substantive equality as the appropriate *immediate* goal of social action often prefer an interventionist state. So it was with Rustin, which helps make sense of his emphasis on the power of a centralized state. Given his explicit commitment to the employment of the power of the state, it is clear that Rustin was no longer committed to an ethic that called into question the existence of the territorial state or implied its elimination. He was thus no longer committed to an ethic that *implies* strong anarchism.

It should now be evident why anarchism is such a valuable analytical lens. Thinking through Rustin's commitments in relation to anarchism has helpfully brought into focus the implications of absolute pacifism. In many ways, so far this chapter has been an extended meditation on the radical implications of absolute pacifism in the contemporary sociopolitical context. I have maintained that Rustin was classifiable as a strong anarchist

precisely because absolute pacifism, to my mind, implies a rejection of the modern territorial state.

But the analysis thus far has done more than make clear the radical character of absolute pacifism and Gandhian nonviolence. It has also made evident how difficult it is for persons committed to racial and economic justice to consistently embrace values that prohibit the use of violence and have as their end the rejection of the modern territorial state. Moreover, my analysis has made clear the fact that Rustin's shift in the 1960s was in part based on his recognition of the practical implications of a commitment to absolute pacifism and Gandhian nonviolence.

In the next section, I want to raise the stakes a bit. If the above analysis was in many respects an attempt to elucidate several critical political philosophical issues related to pacifism, then what follows constitutes an effort to clarify a bundle of questions that revolve around a thoroughgoing commitment to social justice that combines a commitment to using the state's power with an insistence that political disobedience is indispensable for effective social justice activism. In the "Introduction" and in Chapters 1 and 2, I suggested that *weak* anarchism allows for some support of the territorial state. In the final section of this chapter, I explain how this is so and suggest that weak anarchism is a conceptual category worth preserving in that it aptly captures the political philosophical commitments of numerous contemporaries, especially political radicals, such as Bayard Rustin. So what follows is contemplation of the question: Can one be an anarchist and at the same time maintain the necessity of the territorial state for the cause of social justice?

VI

In emphasizing the necessity of a strong centralized state and government intervention, Rustin joins a long tradition of black political activists and social thinkers who are less fearful of state power than of concentrations of private power. Even the most "liberal" of black liberals, perhaps with the exception of conservative liberals such as Thomas Sowell or Clarence Thomas, tend to prefer a strong central state. A strong interventionist state is thought necessary as an instrument with which to discipline both capital and racist factions.

This view, of course, is undergirded by a particular interpretation of American political and social history. A distinctive feature of the experience of Africans in the Americas has been the way in which state action or inaction has determined the social and political status and welfare of the African American community and its members. This applies to enslavement and emancipation and Jim Crowism and the period after the citizenship rights movement of the mid-twentieth century. From the end of the American Civil

War through the New Deal era and the modern civil rights movement, many black social analysts have pointed to the positive functions of the national American government for African American persons. The use of force by the Union Army, of course, served as the means by which the Southern slave aristocracy was overthrown. And nearly a century later the federal government had to intervene in order to end Jim Crowism. These events are often interpreted as evidence of the necessity of a strong state for the protection of black persons in the American context. Such an interpretation of American history undoubtedly renders anarchism less attractive for African American social thinkers than it might otherwise be.

Nonetheless, I believe that careful reflection on various aspects of black social and political thought, particularly the values and principles that are prioritized, reveals that certain strands of black thought commend an attitude toward authority that is consistent with a particular variety of anarchism, namely weak anarchism. As is widely acknowledged, in addition to frequently commending the intervention of a strong state in society, many African American social thinkers have tended to proactively support political disobedience. In this respect African American social thought and praxis merely bears the imprint of its origins in a white supremacist social order: runaway slaves and freedom seekers in Jim Crow America lived in defiance of the state, its laws, and its agents. From Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass to Rosa Parks, Angela Davis, and Jessie Jackson, black social actors and thinkers have often denied the supremacy of the positive laws of the American state.

The commitments to state-centered social change and political disobedience, when taken together, constitute a distinctive dimension of African American political thought. According to Michael Dawson, the embrace of these two precepts marks the principal difference between what he refers to as “black liberalism” and the liberalism that he refers to as “the American Creed” (i.e. the mainstream liberalism adopted by a large class of white persons).⁴⁵ We can set aside the issue of whether black liberalism is the most appropriate label to attach to the political ideology in question and concentrate on the content of this ideology. We can also bracket the question as to whether all or even most African Americans accept the two principles in question. For our purposes, it is appropriate to focus on members of what, following Cedric J. Robinson, has been referred to as the *black radical tradition*.⁴⁶ Black radicals, I would like to suggest, do in fact embrace a commitment to (1) political disobedience (i.e. extraelectoral activism, protest, and agitation) and (2) state-centered social change.

Rustin was a member of this tradition par excellence, even in the phase during which he published his essay “From Protest to Politics.” To understand how this is so, it is vital to appreciate that during the course of his advocating for a turn to electoral politics, Rustin presents *only* a practical claim about the importance of numbers (as power) for effectuating change;

his is not a claim about the importance of majority support as a basis for the moral legitimacy of a given political entity or political decision. That is to say, during the civil rights movement strategy-debate that I discussed above, Rustin embraced electoral politics as a part of a strategy for improving the economic situation of the economically marginalized. In criticizing protest, Rustin aimed only to persuade radicals to reconsider its proper place. Consistent with this, in early 1968, weeks before the planned start of the Poor People's Campaign and months before the famed Democratic convention in Chicago, he intimates:

If our job is to get housing, schools, jobs and better medical care, then there is only one way to get them—and it is not by protest. Protest is not going to pressure Congress into doing things. We can protest but we can't make that the emphasis. The emphasis must be [formal] politics, because if we want billions of dollars from Congress then we've got to create the kind of Congress, which is prepared to vote that money.⁴⁷

Rustin's above statement was an indirect criticism of King's effort to launch a protest movement for economic justice and a direct challenge to the new leftists who we discussed above. Again, to Rustin, the radicals of the 1960s, namely new leftists, were guilty of myopia. They adopted radicalism as a stance rather than as a strategy; they treated protest as an end when its rightful place is only as a means to an end.

Rustin urged activists to be more strategic or selective about their use of protest and more methodical in planning protests when it did in fact constitute the appropriate method. In general, he stressed three points: every direct action initiative needed to be linked to particular injustices or wrongs; direct action organizers needed to consider the probable effect of a given protest on potential allies; and direct action needed to be deployed only when it promised attaining material objectives. Rustin's exacting pragmatic bent is especially on display in a 1970 essay where he stresses the value of protest as means rather than an end. He complains that "black protest [has become] an end in itself and not a means toward social change." Such protest, says Rustin, "is an enormously expressive phenomenon which is releasing the pent-up resentments of generations of oppressed Negroes. But expressiveness that is oblivious to political reality and not structured by instrumental goals is mere bombast."⁴⁸

Rustin's emphasis on the rational relationship between means and ends is notable because it directs our attention to the fact that, in his essays during the mid-to-late 1960s and early 1970s, he believes himself to be providing a "realistic strategy for achieving fundamental social change."⁴⁹ Especially notable for our purposes, Rustin was always open to employing nonviolent direct action and engaging in political disobedience. And he remained a radical activist in the most significant sense.

But why is being clear about the character of radicalism important in the first place? The short answer is the most relevant: the term radical is valuable as a descriptive marker. To an extent, to understand the characteristics of radicals is indispensable to our effort to understand the sociopolitical world that we inhabit. As simple as it might sound, being human amounts to little more than engaging in practical activity. We are constantly in the process of setting objectives, devising plans concerning how to realize them, and attempting to realize them in practice. Religious, political, and ethical life consist largely of (1) reflection on means and ends in relation to special values or ultimate values, which we call moral values or goods and (2) action in accord with the values or principles in question. The term "radical" helps us describe and interpret our experience. Specifically, in the political domain, the term radical is introduced in order to elucidate and differentiate between certain means, on the one hand, and certain ends on the other. Self-identifying radicals debate among themselves about both what qualifies as (1) a radical path to a given end and (2) what makes for a radical end. Others, of course, argue about whether the term radical is one of praise or ridicule. I mean neither to praise nor to ridicule at this point. Rather, I mean to mark off certain normative visions and the associated means so as to facilitate understanding of our sociopolitical milieu.

If Rustin is not always remembered as a radical, it is because sometimes too much emphasis is given to the means that he proposed on particular occasions without reference to the ends that he hoped to effectuate, and without meditation on the spirit in which the given means were proposed. In one of the more discerning analyses of Rustin's activism, Daniel Levine sheds important light on Rustin's conception of radicalism. In *Bayard Rustin and the Civil Rights Movement*, Levine explains:

[For Rustin] the goal of political action was attainable progress. Things had to move, in fact, for the people he often referred to as "the masses of Negro people" (and he occasionally used the term "lumpen"). Sometimes this might mean action in the streets, defying laws (though always willing to suffer the legal consequences). Sometimes it might mean an entirely legal demonstration or march. Sometimes it might mean working within the political system, with Congress, the Department of Justice, or the president. The goal was to make a difference now, in this world, for the people now on earth. People who accuse Rustin of abandoning his radicalism do not realize that for him radicalism was instrumental, not a stance.⁵⁰

I want to draw attention to Levine's evocative repetitive invocation of the terms "now" and "sometimes." Levine points us to the fact that Rustin combined an idealistic impulse with a deep commitment to making a concrete "difference now . . . for people now on earth." Rustin was something of a

now-oriented radical, who would “sometimes” propose this course of action, “sometimes” that one. By Rustin’s own account, he was quite impatient, deeply concerned with the consequences of social action, and remarkably adaptable, which bears on our analysis in significant ways.

Based on our analysis of Rustin in this chapter, and in the light of Levine’s depiction, we might say that Rustin, particularly during the 1960s and 1970s, put a premium on what Barbara Epstein refers to as “the politics of immediate efficacy.” According to Epstein, persons motivated by the politics of immediate efficacy are acutely concerned with the immediate consequences of any contemplated sociopolitical action. Epstein contrasts persons committed to the politics of immediate efficacy with persons committed to “the politics of experience and utopian vision.” The latter type of activist is (1) eminently concerned with combating existential problems (particularly the sense of alienation), (2) typically devoted to living in accord with certain values, and (3) committed to the view that imagining and engaging in alternative lifestyles constitutes the key to adequate social change.⁵¹

To appreciate the way in which the idea of the politics of immediate efficacy accentuates important aspects of Rustin’s sociopolitical thought during the 1960s and 1970s, we can once more compare Rustin with Dorothy Day. The pair held many values in common. The bases of their mutual affection were many, but the thing that they agreed on most was the ethical priority of the Sermon on the Mount. Further, they agreed that Christian love entailed being in solidarity with the oppressed. In the light of this, both Rustin and Day were committed to radical politics and emphasized the “fierce urgency of now,” to borrow King’s phrase. On the basis of these common commitments, they worked side-by-side on several social justice projects periodically throughout their respective careers. All of this notwithstanding, as we have seen, Day and Rustin parted ways on the question of centralization versus decentralization.

One way to make sense of their divergence on this matter is to understand how their contrasting dispositions led them to evaluate action(s) differently. I do not want to overstate Day’s patience or exaggerate Rustin’s concern with practical consequences. But it is safe to say that Day was more willing than Rustin to act on faith, *hoping* that the consequences of her actions would come into fruition at some point—perhaps distant point—in the future. Further, Day focused on a smaller scale than Rustin. She was not as concerned with each of her actions having an impact on the entire nation. Day’s focus was on day-to-day concerns, ethical minutiae, an orientation structured by what we might call, after engaged Buddhist Thich Nhat Hahn, “mindful living” or the ethics of attentiveness. Day was concerned with what she ate, with the tone of voice that she employed with friends and strangers, with her dress—everyday virtuousness. Dorothy Day’s politics of experience and

utopian vision exhibits a sort of patience and comfort with the unknown that Rustin's politics lack in the 1960s and 1970s.

Rustin, of course, was dismissive of the politics of experience (what he refers to as expressiveness as "bombast") and the politics of utopian vision because to him such political orientations lead to action that is "not structured by instrumental goals." I would argue that Rustin's emphasis on the immediate efficacy of action informed his rejection of absolute pacifism, decentralization, and radical lifestyle experimentation, ideals that are central to *strong* anarchism in most of its contemporary emanations.

But Rustin's radical impatience is a coin with two sides. For, just as his emphasis on the immediate efficacy of sociopolitical action meant that in the end he was unable to commend absolute pacifism, communal living, or decentralist projects, Rustin was also unwilling to rely on the formal political process. The two sides of this coin, then, correlate with the black radical tradition's twofold commitment to political disobedience and state-centered social change.⁵² As simple as it might sound, impatience with injustice and the concomitant commitment to social justice is what gives shape to the activism of the black radical tradition as a general matter.

Indeed, the political praxis of black radicals is *radical* owing precisely to the rigorous commitment to social justice that orients the actions of its members. The primacy that black radicals accord to social justice informs black radicals' social theory and praxis in two ways, as has already been suggested. To begin, the primacy that most black radicals accord to social justice motivates the acceptance of what can be referred to as an instrumental embrace of the state. (The state is valued as an instrument with which to positively alter social conditions.) On the surface this instrumental valuation of the state might be taken to entail a commitment to the view that one bears a *moral* obligation to obey the authorities or commands of that state. But an instrumental valuation of the state does not, as a practical matter or as a logical philosophical matter, require one to accept the legitimacy of the state or the idea of political obligation that is so often attached to claims about legitimate political authority.⁵³ And radical social activists, including members of the black radical tradition, certainly do not value the American state in a way that gives rise to the claim that there exists a *moral* duty to follow its laws and commands. An impatience with injustice or the primacy of social justice that undergirds the black radical ethos conditions how radicals relate to political authorities and the territorial state, so that, among black radicals, social justice is distinguished from and given primacy over values such as social order, obedience, civility, formal procedure, and so on.

Considering the general qualities and commitments of the social radical might make this point a bit clearer. On my view, radical social activists ordinarily have or possess three related values, beliefs, or qualities that

set them apart from others. First, radical activists are typically persons who subscribe to and have determined to focus on a higher law of some sort, whether it is a set of moral principles derived from an interpretation of divine revelation, a prophet's message, a philosopher's treatise, or a revolutionary's manifesto. The higher law serves as the source of a radical's sociopolitical vision. This vision then inspires a critical perspective and a radical posture vis-à-vis standing political institutions. Second, with the stringent moral standard in mind, radical activists often contend that for the most part all existing territorial states are complicit in various types of exploitation, repression, and oppression that render them unjust *and* illegitimate from a moral vantage. Finally, because radicals tend to insist that vision and reality can and must be united via some kind of politically disobedient action, radicals are often disinclined to limit their praxis to the mechanisms and processes established and sanctioned by ruling political authorities. In fact, radicals typically insist that a commitment to social justice requires keeping open the means available in the pursuit for social justice.⁵⁴ Along these lines, in the essay "Resistance to Civil Government," where Thoreau explicitly rejects voting and lobbying, and relates that "As for adopting the ways which the State has provided for remedying the evil, I know not of such ways. They take too much time, and a man's life will be gone."⁵⁵ For John Brown, Karl Marx, Huey Newton, and others this means keeping revolutionary violence on the table. For Garrison, Tolstoy, Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr, and others this means always being prepared to employ nonviolent direct action.

Consistent with the description above, we can say that members of the black radical tradition reject the idea that there is a general *moral* duty to obey the commands of political authorities; and so we can say that black radicals reject the idea that there are political obligations and deny the idea that political authorities have the right to issue commands that persons have a moral duty to obey. Finally, in consequence of the aspects of black radical thought discussed above, I contend that members of the black radical tradition exemplify what it means to reject the legitimacy of the territorial state *and* at the same time assert the necessity of the territorial state for desired social change.

This latter contention brings us to the central question of this section. How should we name or describe, as a political philosophical matter, persons who vehemently reject the idea that there are general moral duties to obey the law or territorial state commands and at the same time insist on the necessity of the state for liberation? I would argue that this is one of the more important questions for persons interested in descriptive ethics and in the study of social movement activism in general. On my view, we can wholly appreciate the character and implications of radical social theory and praxis only if we employ idiosyncratic conceptual terminology in our (interpretive) descriptions of it. Accordingly, I think that it is appropriate to

categorize persons who commend perpetual political disobedience as *weak* anarchists.

Some theorists maintain that employing the term anarchism to describe persons who advocate for political disobedience without hoping to abolish or eliminate the territorial state is inappropriate. The term anarchism, it is suggested, ought to be preserved for persons who reject the state as such. Chaim Gans pursues this line of argumentation in his work, *Philosophical Anarchism and Political Disobedience*. Gans is primarily concerned with weak anarchists (or in his terms, “philosophical anarchists”), specifically professional philosophers, who assert that there is no general moral duty to obey the law, yet then give a host of moral reasons to account for why one should ordinarily obey the laws of most existing territorial states. Gans maintains, on the basis of his analysis of such anarchists, that weak anarchism is anarchism with “no bite.” For him, the use of the term is misleading, since the behavior of many self-described weak anarchists is or will be indistinguishable from persons who maintain that there *is* a general moral duty to obey the law.⁵⁶

One of the advantages of thinking about weak anarchism in relation to political radicals, as opposed to professional philosophers, is that it focuses our attention on activists who more or less engage in practices that are indistinguishable from strong anarchists as opposed to the professional philosophers that Gans has in mind when he questions the value of weak anarchism as an analytical construct. Accordingly, it is critical to acknowledge that the black radical tradition's members (and social movement activists generally speaking) take a stance vis-à-vis the state that is different from most persons residing in the American political territory. For, it seems undeniable that the person committed to perpetually employing political disobedience in order to contest unjust sociopolitical practices relates to political authority in ways that are substantially different from the majority of political agents. And unlike political liberals who regard the use of political disobedience as appropriate in exceptional cases or circumstances, radicals insist that disobedience is central to social justice activism. For radical social activists, formal political practices such as voting and lobbying take on a secondary importance at best. Further, while many political liberals take for granted the legitimacy of existing constitutional democratic governments, radicals proceed more or less from the assumption that existing territorial states are illegitimate.

In practice, these differences manifest in ways that are important for us to make sense of. And weak anarchism strikes me as an appropriate term for this purpose because of the fact that the radical social activist who advocates for and engages in political disobedience asserts in clear terms a central tenet of weak anarchism: there is no general moral duty to obey political authorities or the law in virtue of their social status or the source of the law.⁵⁷ The weak anarchists' position, then, is an important one to

consider as we reflect on and endeavor to understand the history of political philosophy and social action.

As is often noted, the normative vision as to the individual person's proper relation to the state has undergone profound changes in recent centuries. Paul Goodman, the radical libertarian writer, suggested in the early 1970s that the West was on the brink of a New Reformation, by which he meant a rejection of the authority of the priesthood of the scientists and elite politicians and technocrats; others have argued at length that the 1960s and 1970s brought about the rejection of all forms of authority, including political authority. The significance of the late twentieth-century social movements, then, might be considered analogous to the Protestant Reformation. As the story of that sixteenth-century Reformation goes, the signs began during the Renaissance, with developments in the arts and astronomy, with the emergence of biblical criticism, or translations of the Bible into languages that large classes of the public could read, and criticisms of the moral probity of the clergy. These factors along with others slowly ushered in a rejection, by many, of the authority of the Roman Catholic Church. The Protestant Reformation itself then set in motion a more widespread rejection of the religious authority of clerics. Lutheranism spawned Anabaptism, and Congregationalist governance would soon rival Episcopalian polity.

Only time will reveal the full importance of modern social movements and revolutions. But what is clear is that there have been crucial changes. In his work *Democracy and Its Critics*, Robert Dahl offers an illuminating description of the way in which modern social developments have factored into altered conceptions of the individual person's moral duties vis-à-vis political institutions. According to Dahl,

By the time anarchism was recast . . . in the nineteenth century, belief in the moral right to revolt against a bad regime was widely shared, certainly by most liberals and democrats. In the twentieth century the systematic terror, brutality, and oppression of totalitarian regimes converted what once might have been an arguable proposition into an almost uncontested assumption. Democrats, liberals, conservatives, radicals, revolutionaries, Christians, Jews, Muslims, atheists, and agnostics all agree [with anarchists] that no person has an obligation to support or obey an evil state.⁵⁸

Dahl is not primarily interested in the commitments of black radicals, yet I submit that he articulates the way in which most contemporary radicals, including black radicals such as Bayard Rustin, relate to the territorial state or political authority.

It is with the above in mind that I would like to suggest that we should refer to Bayard Rustin as a certain type of anarchist, even after he abandoned his radical pacifism. Again, to refer to black radicals, including the later Rustin,

as weak anarchists makes explicit an important development in radical sociopolitical thought during recent centuries: the widespread rejection of political authority in a traditional sense and a denial of the notion that there exists a moral obligation to obey political authorities in virtue of their formal social status, for a combination of principled and pragmatic reasons. The above point directs our attention to one of the distinctive features of radical social theory and praxis. Radicals tend to be pragmatic on principle. That is, a principled commitment to social justice inspires a pragmatic orientation. Black radicals can be properly described as persons who embrace weak anarchism in the light of a commitment to social justice and on the basis of a theory or assumption about the best way to liberate the oppressed and protect certain freedoms.

This book has in large part been an attempt to remember past radicalism. I have stressed the significance of conceptual clarity owing to my conviction that how we remember the past is largely a function of the terms that we invoke in order to make sense of it. And what we remember—that is, the stories that we tell about the past—nearly always exerts normative force in the present. For my part, I have given extensive attention to theorists of social change who put a premium on (right) action in accord with conscience or morally motivated political disobedience. In this chapter, particularly in this section, I take myself to be identifying the political philosophical description or categorization of black radicalism as a hard case and to be offering or at least inviting better or more helpful ways of describing certain types of action. Appropriately, I have suggested that we best capture Rustin's attitude toward political authority—the law and the state—if we characterize his political philosophy in terms of anarchism. But to be clear, I do not take myself to be settling this issue here. Rather, I am proposing a certain interpretation in part in order to provoke fruitful debate. For, one might want to take up this problem of classification or description only so as to say why I am incorrect to describe the theory and praxis of black radicals in the way that I have.

But even if one agrees with my classification, there are other important matters to take up. For example, one might concede that I am correct to describe the political philosophical commitments of black radicals in the way that I have, yet insist that persons committed to perpetual political disobedience and the occasional use of state power are in error from a moral vantage. Related to this, political theorists or philosophers might want to focus on tensions extant in the thought of a weak anarchist. For instance, one interested in the problem of double standards might ask, why should persons opposed to black radicals' political visions ever comply with any territorial state commands generated by black radical activism? Can a black radical provide moral reasons in order to justify his or her preferences with respect to the use of territorial state power? These are vital questions that are important to ask and answer, independent of how one comes down on them.

VII

Gene Sharp, a leading nonviolent direct action theorist, provides perhaps the clearest articulation of precisely how attitudes toward authority relate to nonviolent social change in his work *Waging Nonviolent Struggle*. Sharp follows Thoreau, Tolstoy, and Gandhi in stressing the fact that the source of political power is and its maintenance depends on obedience and cooperation. These in turn hinge on a populace's acceptance of authority. In Sharp's words,

Authority is necessary for the existence and operation of any regime. All rulers require an acceptance of their authority: their right to rule, command, and be obeyed. . . . The weakening or collapse of authority inevitably tends to loosen the subjects' predisposition towards obedience. . . . The loss of authority sets in motion the disintegration of the rulers' power. Their power is reduced to the degree that their authority is repudiated.⁵⁹

Rustin understood Sharp's point quite well, as have most black radicals. With a nonviolent theory of social change in mind, and history as his tutor, Rustin once proclaimed, "We need in every community a group of angelic troublemakers. Our power is in our ability to make things unworkable. All we have is our bodies. We need to tuck them, tuck them, in places so that the wheels don't turn."⁶⁰

Anyone concerned about the situation of the world's dispossessed and oppressed, including America's poor, whether brown, white, or black, whether suburbanites, urbanites, or country folk, probably appreciates that every community needs a few angelic troublemakers. No less than in the 1960s, poor persons in America lack power. Fifty years after passage of the Voting Rights Act, the condition of the black underclass has been only modestly altered. By some measures its size and scope has expanded. In such a context, it is crucial for American critical theorists and radical activists to grapple with the normative visions articulated by black radicals and others during the mid-1960s. In particular, we should reflect on the rationale for and the consequences of the calls, during the mid-to-late 1960s and after, for the normalization of social action and for the replacement of nonviolent direct action with formal political action and advocacy.

Rustin's activist career is especially important, as he was at the center of a debate about the meaning of social justice and the means necessary for attaining it that continues up to the present moment. In this chapter, I have endeavored to give an account of Rustin's shift from protest to politics and have attempted to demonstrate that what was at issue in his running

debate with King and Carmichael was the anticipated effectiveness of rival strategies for social change and not the question as to the moral acceptability of political disobedience. Rustin rightly contended that civil rights were null in the absence of certain social and economic conditions. Formal legal equality was not enough because wholly exercising civil rights hinges on achieving a certain social and economic status. Moreover, Rustin's criticisms of decentralist projects were a salutary intervention on the American left. Rustin was correct to worry that abandoning the American state, or efforts to shape its practices, would put the welfare of African Americans in jeopardy, given the role that the federal government has played in African American life since the Great Depression, or even the American Civil War. While I have less faith in the American territorial state than Rustin did and find myself more and more attracted to the decentralists that Rustin so often criticized, Rustin's point is well taken and his intervention presents an important challenge to strong anarchists who argue for a redirection of energies away from the territorial state and electoral politics.

Yet as important as Rustin's thought might be for strong anarchists, it strikes me as though his legacy poses the greatest challenge to political liberals, republicans, and card-carrying Democrats. As a member of the black radical tradition, Rustin insisted on making a concrete difference for people now on earth. He internalized the black radical mantra announced by Frederick Douglass: there can be no justice or progress without struggle and without sacrifice. Rustin demanded a return on action. For radical activists who reject strong anarchism and embrace state-centered theories of social change, the most important question is how to make state institutions respond to the needs of the working class and unemployed.

Reflecting on Rustin's thought invites a reconsideration of the direction that social activism has moved in recent decades. On some levels, with little to show for it, an entire generation of activists has stayed on a path similar to the one that Rustin laid out in his most famous essay. Since the late 1960s, liberals and leftists—whether black, white, yellow, or brown—have relied mostly on formal political action. Rustin's understanding of the inadequacy of civil rights legislation was prescient. Yet, at the same time, in retrospect, it is clear that Rustin placed undue faith in the formal electoral process. From our vantage, it is all too apparent that the Democratic Party cannot be the vehicle of revolution that Rustin envisioned in the 1960s and that formal electoral politics in general cannot deliver the goods that Rustin hoped for.

Realizing and being faithful to Bayard Rustin's sociopolitical vision will probably be possible only if social justice theorists, organizers, and activists invert his thesis and move from politics to protest. As it is, extrajudicial means have almost always been necessary in order to radically transform social structures and redistribute power. And the time that has elapsed since Rustin wrote his famous essay has only confirmed the fact that social

justice comes only after struggle. To that end, if we are to be and become the kinds of persons that act in ways that lead to a world that better accords with our visions, we will probably have to adopt Rustin's *attitude* toward political authority. That is, the practical viability of realizing the needed social action will likely hinge on the degree to which we are able to embody the anarchist's spirit or attitude, which is precisely why we must remember the visions, sacrifices, and heritage of angelic troublemakers.