Special Section:
Politics, Collective Uncertainty, and
the Renunciation of Power

A central issue for understanding the outcomes of highly challenging situations is the emergence and resolution of collective stances. Ivan Ermakoff's book Ruling Oneself Out: A Theory of Collective Abdications *(2008) explores this issue by considering processes of collective abdication and decision making in two highly contested and revealing cases: the decisions to abdicate constitutional power in Germany (1933) and in France (1940). In this critical exchange Howard Kimeldorf, Ari Adut, and John R. Hall address the main claims of* Ruling Oneself Out *as well as the theoretical and epistemological challenges raised by these claims. Three broad questions emerge from this discussion. The first concerns the explanatory relevance of motives such as fear, misjudgment, and collusion, to which in retrospect we are prone to impute such dramatic and momentous decisions. The second centers on the possible connections between the theory of collective alignment and contemporary work on organizations. The third engages the open-ended character of the processes at play and the issue of analytic generalization.*

Howard Kimeldorf

Social Science as If History Mattered
Reflections on Ruling Oneself Out

Ruling Oneself Out is an extremely impressive scholarly achievement at multiple levels. It offers a model of how to identify and pose an important research question; that is, a question worth asking and answering not only because it is intrinsically interesting but also because it is theoretically puzzling and at the same time of great practical significance. *Ruling Oneself Out* is all this and more.

Ivan Ermakoff (2008) begins by asking about the conditions that lead dominant actors to surrender their power in ways that are likely to undermine their own interests. It is an intriguing question and all the more puzzling because he examines this process in the context of two cases in which the decision to surrender power was reached after a long and public process of deliberation and discussion. Moreover, both cases—the German Reichstag's passage of the enabling act in March 1933 that gave Adolf Hitler the authority to circumvent the constitution and the transfer of state power to the proponents of an authoritarian and reactionary Vichy regime in the sum-

mer of 1940—followed open and democratic decision-making procedures to realize an outcome that would ultimately undermine the commitment to democracy that made those outcomes possible. Why would an overwhelming majority of elected public officials in both cases vote against their own deeply held democratic commitments and against their own political interests and convictions so as to usher in nothing less than a revolutionary transformation of the state by legal means? Why indeed?

Before offering his own answer, Ermakoff carefully and judiciously reviews the three standard explanations for political surrender or abdication. His presentation and critique of each explanation is guided by game-theoretical reasoning in which challengers confront a target group of actors who have a clear interest in rejecting the challengers' bid for power. What makes each of these explanations so compelling, at first blush, is that they resonate so clearly with our commonsense understandings of politics and decision making.

The first explanation that Ermakoff critiques boils down to the proposition that target actors are at some level coerced into abdicating. There is certainly some truth to this in both cases. In Germany, Hitler's electoral success in 1932, when the National Socialists captured a plurality of the popular vote, was set against a backdrop of rising political violence directed against anyone who opposed the Nazis. The following winter, with the burning of the Reichstag building, which Nazi leaders falsely blamed on the Communist Party, civil rights were curtailed, and thousands of leftists, along with more centrist democratic activists, were arrested, imprisoned, and persecuted. Many were forced to flee. Likewise, in France the surrender of democratic forces occurred in the context of a stunning military defeat that culminated with the German army marching on Paris. The threat of physical harm, even death, was real for those who stood in the path of the advancing Nazi military machine. Resisting politically involved considerable risk. Yet some did resist. In Germany the Social Democratic Party cast all of its 94 votes against the enabling act that empowered Hitler, while in France a minority of socialist leaders and their allies voted against ceding power to Marshal Philippe Pétain, who promptly abolished the legislative power of Parliament, disempowered and adjourned the national assembly, and declared himself head of state. The problem with a coercion-based explanation, as Ermakoff argues, is that it is asked to do too much, for if coercion can lead to abdication in some cases, it sparks resistance in others. In short, coercion fails not only to

explain the sources of resistance to challengers but also to identify the conditions under which coercion produces in target actors not just fear but, more important, their capitulation.

Ermakoff next critiques a second commonsense explanation for abdication, the possibility of miscalculation. Here the argument is that target actors surrender because they misjudge the significance and implications of the challenge they are facing, or perhaps they are simply deceived by challengers who conceal their real intentions. Again, there is some merit to this claim in both cases. For example, some scholars have argued that Hitler, prior to consolidating power, tried to cultivate an image that he represented a moderate or orderly strain of Nazism, that he was nothing more than a vigorous proponent of German nationalism—a view that resonated with traditional conservatism. Similarly, in France many political actors, including those who voted to turn over power to Pétain, claimed after the fact that they were confused about the goals and consequences of legislation that ultimately led to the installation of the collaborationist Vichy regime. I do not have the historical expertise to evaluate the credibility of such arguments pointing to miscalculation, but Ermakoff presents a persuasive case that they amount to little more than ad hoc justifications. He offers considerable evidence in both cases to support his claim that information about the challengers' agenda in Germany and France was, as he writes, "public and widely shared" (129). In light of what was known at the time about the Nazis' actions and stated goals, it is unlikely that, among savvy political actors, the level of ignorance or disbelief could have risen to the point that the decision to surrender was largely a result of misinformation.

Finally, Ermakoff critiques those explanations for abdication that focus on ideological collusion—arguing, in effect, that the interests of challengers and target actors may not be mutually exclusive. Once again this commonsense explanation offers a kernel of truth. In Germany one can see a degree of ideological convergence between Catholic-based political and religious leaders who shared the Nazis' antipathy toward communism, modernity, and liberal political values more generally. Likewise, it has been argued that France's decisive military defeat on the battlefield, coupled with the rise of totalitarian movements across depression-ravaged Europe, contributed to a widespread retreat from democratic commitments, on the one hand, and an openness to authoritarian solutions, on the other. Yet, as Ermakoff concludes, such arguments about ideological collusion work only if we ignore

two stubborn historical facts: first, that the ideological chasm between challengers and target actors remained wide throughout the entire period of public debate in both countries and, second, that most elected officials who voted to surrender experienced their decision as a profoundly agonizing dilemma, suggesting that the degree of ideological congruence was minimal at best.

Ermakoff makes his case against all three commonsense explanations—coercion, miscalculation, and ideological collusion—through a powerful combination of game-theoretical reasoning grounded empirically in a close examination of the available historical data from archives, memoirs, and other records of the decision-making process leading up to the fateful votes to abdicate. I find his critique of the three explanations quite compelling. But I wonder if there is another way to think about these three alternative explanations, one that gives them greater traction. Ermakoff, in his effort to lay bare the causal mechanisms implicit in each explanation, treats them in isolation from one another, as if they were fully independent pressures impinging on his target actors: coercion causes fear, which leads to abdication; miscalculation leads to underestimating the degree of threat, which makes abdication possible; ideological collusion creates a false sense of security, which paves the way for abdication. Ermakoff's commitment to the independence of each explanation is such that at various points he uses one to critique the other, arguing, for example, that if ideological collusion is present, then coercion would not be necessary. All that is true as far as it goes.

But what if, instead of treating the three commonsense explanations as independent, we saw them as naturally interacting and mutually reinforcing one another? What if, as seems likely, flesh and blood political actors were subject to all three causal pressures at once? One could imagine, for example, a member of the Center Party in Germany—whose support proved decisive for Hitler's rise to power—pondering his or her vote while weighing the very real possibility of retaliation against oneself or one's party (a form of coercion) and doing so also in a moment of political despair while looking for a sign, any sign, that the threat posed by the Nazis was not really as bad as it appeared (a form of miscalculation) and, as a result, aggressively seeking out and amplifying any possible points of political agreement with his or her challengers around which they might strike a workable compromise (a form of ideological collusion). In sum, while I generally agree with Ermakoff that no single explanation—whether it is coercion, miscalculation, or ideological collusion—explains the decision to surrender power in Germany or France,

it may be that together, *and in combination*, they are closer to providing an adequate account for understanding how actors might come to support outcomes—like abdication—that run counter to their own interests.

Ermakoff's own explanation for abdication is an analytically powerful account that embraces a similarly complex model of decision making. The key, he argues, is understanding the collective dimension of decisions, a process he terms "collective alignment" (chap. 6). Collective alignment relies in turn on three processes: sequence, local knowledge, and tacit coordination. Alignments are sequential to the extent that actors first observe how others around them respond to threats, either verbally or behaviorally, and then use that information or those cues to guide their own response. Local knowledge and tacit coordination represent two kinds of diffusion processes: local knowledge is gained from face-to-face interactions and allows actors to assess the position or stance of a group with which they identify; coordination is tacit to the extent that actors can draw inferences from reference group members who take the lead in fashioning a response to threats.

In his engaging narrative analysis of the decision to surrender, Ermakoff employs all three processes—sequence, local knowledge, and tacit coordination—to understand what he terms the "production of consent" (chap. 8): the nuts and bolts of the decision-making process that led to abdication in Germany and France. His analysis is subtle, empirically grounded, and convincing. One comes away with a deep sense of the indeterminacy of the outcome. Time and again we read of the profound uncertainty that grips actors on the ground as they vacillate between competing positions, sometimes in the space of no more than a few hours. Anyone who has ever lived through moments of intense political turmoil, particularly when the stakes are high, will recognize themselves in the text. The only constant is the unknown— what Ermakoff variously terms the "resilience of uncertainty" (243) or the "consistency of inconsistency" (307). In this context of global contingency, some tipping points signal enduring shifts, whereas others prove highly reversible. Ermakoff's skillfully controlled narrative of the decision-making process in each case serves as a powerful critique to presentist notions that the outcomes in Germany or France were in any way inevitable. They were not. Rather, they were the product of a contested set of calculations recalibrated through ongoing public discourse and influenced as much by the presence as by the conspicuous absence of prominent voices at each stage in the conversation.

Stated in more programmatic terms, Ermakoff posits that collective abdication is driven by evolving expectations that are formed dialogically—in this case, quite literally as part of an unfolding dialogue among multiple target groups, each constantly recalibrating its own position in response to each other as well as to challengers. A key part of forging a consensus for abdication, or presumably any collective alignment, is gaining knowledge of those other groups, their properties and relative salience, and their public stands and behaviors. This strikes me as an eminently sensible model of decision making under conditions of heightened uncertainty. And while I find Ermakoff's general approach both compelling and persuasive, it raises for me three intriguing questions.

First, I would like to know more about the *relationships* among the three mechanisms that are at the heart of his explanation for collective alignments. Is some form of sequence and path dependence the one constant, always important regardless of the context in which decisions are rendered? Or is the importance of sequence itself contingent on the character and the stakes of what is under discussion? Similarly, if we conceptualize local knowledge and tacit coordination as two distinct processes for diffusing information and guiding action, are they in some sense "functional substitutes" for one another, such that the presence of one diminishes the other? Are there certain types of decisions or political environments in which tacit coordination or local knowledge are more likely to be decisive? In his defense, Ermakoff speaks to these questions but mainly in the specific context of his case studies. I would like to see a more general discussion of the interconnectedness among his three causal mechanisms, one that lays out a bit more clearly their scope conditions and relationality as part of building, if possible, an even sturdier theory of decision making under pressure.

Second, I very much appreciate Ermakoff's model of decision making, which highlights the complex, recursive, and contingent nature of the process. But it is not entirely clear how his approach differs from recent work by scholars of organizational processes. This is in truth a naive question on my part, since I do not read regularly in these areas. Still, it is my impression that students of complex organizations have moved over the last two decades in a similar direction to Ermakoff in recognizing that organizational environments act in patterned ways to constrain sense making by key decision makers, that the process of reaching a decision is complex and contingent, and that the outcomes, however path-dependent, are often unknowable in

advance. To Ermakoff's credit, he offers a more precise specification of the mechanisms that contribute to and shape the contingent character of decision making. But I would find it useful to know where his approach dovetails with and where precisely it diverges from work by contemporary scholars of organizational processes and collective decision making.

And finally, in a study that deals centrally with political decision making I would like to hear more about the role of individual ideological commitments and interior emotional states. Ermakoff is certainly aware of these as motives for action, but they are often relegated to the status of lower-order preferences of individual actors. Of course, the exact hierarchy of preferences animating any actor is the result of multiple pressures, including the mechanisms that Ermakoff highlights in his account of collective alignments. Still, the role of political ideology is not to be denied in a study where the only votes cast in opposition to Hitler come from a single party on the left of the political spectrum, the Social Democrats. It is much the same story in France, where the political opposition is led mainly by those who are most ideologically opposed to the Nazis. How did those ideological commitments shape the impact of sequence, local knowledge, and tacit coordination? More generally, is there a place in Ermakoff's account for incorporating what we have come to recognize as the increasingly important socioemotional dimension of politics—for thinking about how personal integrity, raw fear, and deep-seated loyalties to parties and particular political leaders might also shape the decision-making process not only for individuals but also for the collective decisions to which they contribute? Penetrating this subjective world, especially a world long since passed, is admittedly not easy, but I would argue that it is nonetheless important if we are to fully understand how flesh and blood actors, when faced with challenges that threaten not only their own interests but their very identities, decide in favor of one course or another—in this case, in favor of dictatorship over democracy. It is hard to imagine a more weighty or important topic for us to research. We owe Ermakoff an enormous intellectual debt for launching this discussion in such a fruitful manner. *Ruling Oneself Out* is historical social science at its very best.

Reference

Ermakoff, Ivan (2008) Ruling Oneself Out: A Theory of Collective Abdications. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Ari Adut

Interest, Collusion, and Alignment
A Critical Evaluation of Ruling Oneself Out

Ivan Ermakoff's *Ruling Oneself Out* focuses on two major instances of voluntary surrender of power in Western history: the March 1933 bill that empowered Adolf Hitler with the right to amend the Weimar Constitution and the transfer of full executive, legislative, and constitutional authority to Marshal Philippe Pétain in July 1940. The first event inaugurated the Third Reich, the other Vichy France. Much ink has been spilled over these events. But Ermakoff finds various problems with the existing accounts and advances his own theory of collective abdication in their stead. Moreover, his theory is geared to analyze all kinds of political crises and breakdowns where collective abdication plays a role—as it often does in such contexts. Ermakoff's theory is a formal one. It can hold for any situation in which a group confronts the possibility of collective persecution and has to decide whether to resist or abdicate. It is not confined to formally defined collectivities or to parliamentary settings: the dynamics that it reveals are independent of specific group configurations and institutional contexts.

Ruling Oneself Out is a huge triumph. It makes a signal contribution to the study of political crises and transitions. It rightly calls our attention to the significance of conflictive conjunctures and offers tools to understand them. This is particularly salutary because crises are episodes whose autonomous interactional logic and macro effects are usually ignored both by structural- ist and by culturalist sociology. Ermakoff deftly combines phenomenology with game theory, quantitative analysis with textual interpretation, formal modeling with archival research. These approaches are rarely mixed in social science. Regrettably, they are even sometimes seen as antithetical to each other. This book, in contrast, shows the extent to which eclecticism can be innovative and productive in social science. I was reminded of the late Roger Gould's work while reading Ermakoff—in terms of scope, reasoning, and quality. *Ruling Oneself Out* is perhaps somewhat overlong (there are some repetitions), but the writing is pellucid throughout.

I want to provide some reflections on the empirical and theoretical claims of the book. I will focus on the French case, since I know a little more about it. My aim is not to argue against the general point of the book but to raise some issues that, I believe, the theory might successfully deal with. I do not doubt the significance of the alignment process that Ermakoff so skillfully traces and analyzes. Yet I want to push him farther on its specific dynamics. I wonder if Ermakoff might not give short shrift to the coercion and collusion arguments in accounting for collective abdication. Perhaps we do not need to choose between these factors. It is possible that the alignment process did occur in a coercive context and that the prospect or the reality of interest-based collusion affected the interactional process. Finally, I want to underline a central theoretical issue: the relationship between abdication and alignment. I think that Ermakoff's case choices allow him to make a convincing claim about the independence of the collective abdication process from group characteristics. But there is a price to pay. We do not quite know when collective alignment will lead to collective abdication and when it will not. We are afforded a model about how collective abdication can come about in different organizational contexts—but at the cost of a general theory of collective alignment.

On July 10, 1940, a great majority of the members of the French National Assembly endorsed a bill that vested the premier of the time, Pétain, with constitutional, executive, and legislative powers. This act legalized the demise of the National Assembly and thus of the Third Republic. Ermakoff

argues against the standard accounts of the vote. These accounts stress coercion or, more specifically, the fear of possible reprisals; deception about the possible consequences of the bill; and ideological collusion with the authoritarianism of the challenger. Ermakoff adduces empirical evidence refuting these accounts. Further, he says that these explanations overlook the actors' uncertainty—their qualms and oscillations during the decision-making process. For him, the upshot was determined by the autonomous logic of the dynamic expectation formation that took shape among parliamentarians in Vichy. The parliamentarians endorsed the power transfer when they realized (through local knowledge and public statements) that no one would oppose it. In other words, the process took the form of a collective self-fulfilling prophecy. The members of the National Assembly later rationalized their decision by portraying it as the only viable and acceptable course of action.

Against the coercion argument, Ermakoff rightly distinguishes between military defeat and political collapse. Following the famous French historian Robert Paxton, he notes that Belgium and Holland, both similarly occupied by Nazis, did not witness a descent into authoritarianism. But there is unfortunately no comparison with these cases in the book, which would have been immensely helpful. Against the coercion argument, Ermakoff also points out that some people voted no and that often groups resist against threats. These are valid points. At the same time, however, many who voted no were the leading politicians of the regime, and it is not impossible that they voted no only because they knew (or thought) that they would be punished in the new regime regardless of their vote. In other words, it is conceivable that those who voted no faced a different incentive structure. After all, the leading politicians of the defunct republic (including Edouard Daladier, Léon Blum, Vincent Auriol, Jules Moch, Paul Reynaud, and Georges Mandel) would later be interned by Vichy.

I do not know how many of those who voted no were interned, but I think this piece of information (along with what happened to those who voted yes) would be important in assessing the validity of the coercion argument. Threat could thus have had some influence at least on some deputies and senators. Some parliamentarians did report fear and coercion. These were advanced as reasons for the yes vote and more often for other people's yes votes—maybe because of the stigma associated with yielding to threats. After all, as Ermakoff himself concedes, the German troops were just a mile away. There were rumors of a coup. A no vote would have led to the resigna-

tion of Pétain and an intractable political crisis. Or at least this is what some members of the French National Assembly could have reasonably thought.

Ermakoff also argues against the collusion thesis: that the senators and the deputies were contaminated by the antidemocratic ideology of the challenger. He says that there were real ideological divisions in the Third Republic and that many who eventually voted yes first thought of voting no. I think that these are great points. But what if we considered collusion not as something that is primarily ideological but as something that is based on common interest—that is, as opportunistic collaboration? Maybe some deputies and senators perceived a yes vote to be in their interest. If so—if there was already collusion in the vote—then the vote was as much collaboration as abdication. Maybe collaboration started with the vote, and maybe Pétain was not exactly a challenger—as he is in Ermakoff's model—for some of the members of the National Assembly. I would be very interested in Ermakoff's response to these possibilities.

It is crucial to remember that Pétain had been appointed in the midst of a military disaster. He came to liquidate a bankrupt regime. It was the Council of Ministers that considered that the government of France should be vested in a prominent personage having the unanimous respect of the nation. Most French people thought that England would soon topple before the German military juggernaut and that the war would be over—with the government back in Paris. Entrusted with taking France out of the war, Pétain's authority was uncontested inside France and its empire. Most people at the time of the vote differentiated between Pierre Laval and Pétain. Laval had already disclosed his political agenda. Petain was much more ambiguous, and, in any case, the new constitution would have to be ratified by the nation.

Vichy is too often represented in exclusively ideological terms. I think that sometimes we lose sight of its opportunistic aspect. Many joined in not because they were against the republic or particularly hated Jews but because it was expedient. Even though it was not democratic, Vichy engendered an administration that used many cadres from the old system—socialists, communists, radicals, neutralists, Catholics, conservatives, and so on—who all benefited from the regime. What was really terrible about the collaboration was that it included so many elements of the Third Republic. We cannot impute all its horrors to the ideologically motivated Laval and his associates, who were only a faction among others. Former radicals and socialists also participated in Vichy. So the question becomes whether those who voted yes

had already started to think about their futures in the new system. The book does not tell us what happened to those parliamentarians who voted yes. Maybe they were rewarded in one way or another—or maybe they thought that they would be. I believe that some were offered ministerial positions. The prominent representatives of the Faurist faction took a stand in favor of Laval's bill. By contrast, those personally dose to Blum voted no. The Faurists, who were pacifists, may have felt vindicated by the defeat, but they may have also hoped that their yes votes would assure them positions in the new regime. Of all the political parties, the Radical Party had identified itself most closely with the Third Republic. Yet, as Ermakoff points out, almost all of its representatives voted yes. Moreover, many radicals did take part in the Vichy administration. These patterns suggest that Ermakoff may be downplaying the role of coercion and opportunistic collusion (in reality as well as in anticipation) in collective abdication.

The main argument of the book is that the yes vote was the outcome of a complex, indeterminate process of collective alignment. Uncertainty was pervasive, opinions vacillated, and the members of the National Assembly related their decisions to their peers because they expected high costs if their actions proved at odds with the actions of the other group members. There was mimetic alignment, because the decision was highly risky, and, whichever option was chosen, isolation was the worst possible outcome. This was also a situation in which publicly disclosing one's preferences was highly risky; thus local information and public statements by prominent members proved decisive in the alignment process. And what was conveyed through these communications was not only information but, more important, also the frailty of commitments. As a result, the members of the National Assembly were rendered even less committed in a self-fulfilling fashion. The tragic assessment of the situation, the uncertainty of others, made one progressively less uncertain.

I am quite convinced by this account. Ermakoff does an exquisite job of explicating the phenomenology of incertitude and the interactive mechanisms that it generates. His account of how deception both fed and was fed by this process is equally masterful. But the argument assigns a lot of weight to what the prominent members will do; others follow and think of them as representing the group. Yet the alignment process by itself (without exogenous factors like coercion or perceived collusive opportunities) cannot quite predict what the prominent members will do. For example, it is not incon-

ceivable that realizing the mimetic imperatives faced by the nonprominent actors could impel prominent ones to rally them into resistance. If the whole process was internal and if the end result was not a foregone conclusion (as Ermakoff argues), then would this situation not also create splendid opportunities for political entrepreneurs against the challenger? Ermakoff contends that the outcome of the process mostly hinged on the public statements. But is it impossible that the prominent members were themselves at least in part motivated by coercion and by collusive opportunities?[1]

Ermakoff points out that acquiescence was not foreordained, either in March 1933 or in July 1940. But it is not clear from the book when alignment will not eventuate in abdication (independent of coercion or collusion). Ermakoff offers some nonabdication outcomes, such as the student uprising in Kwangju, Korea, in May 1980, but the book does not indicate why things turned out differently there. He argues, along with Paxton, that there is no reason to assume that the only choice in July 1940 was between granting Pétain full constitutional powers and dismissing him. In Belgium and Holland, dictatorship was not the outcome. But we do not know what led to this different result in these other places (whether something exogenous or endogenous to the alignment process), since in both cases the upshot was collective abdication.

Ermakoff's case choices allow him to make a claim about the independence of abdication from group characteristics. A central point of the book is that the alignment process was independent of organizational variables. There was atomism in 1940 and party cohesion in 1933, but the outcomes were the same. This is a brilliant finding. But there is a price to pay for this methodological strategy. Because both cases end in abdication, it is difficult to determine when collective alignment will eventuate in collective abdication and when it will not. One cannot help asking whether there are temporal variables like turning points or recurrent sequences in alignment processes that would enable one to predict outcomes.

These comments and criticisms, however, should not detract us from appreciating the sheer originality and brilliance of *Ruling Oneself Out*, whose contributions to comparative and historical sociology, political sociology, and social theory are both evident and far-reaching.

Note

1   There is also the fact that the charismatic figures who could have opposed Laval, such as Mandel and Daladier, were on board the ship *Massilia*, headed for North Africa.

Reference

Ermakoff, Ivan (2008) Ruling Oneself Out: A Theory of Collective Abdications. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

John R. Hall

Abdication, Collective Alignment, and the Problem of Directionality

In *Ruling Oneself Out* Ivan Ermakoff (2008) addresses the puzzle of what amounts to collective political suicide: why would any constitutional body pass legislation that in effect cedes all its power to another entity—an autocrat? Constitutional rule rules itself out, closing off any pathway *back* to constitutional rule. Ermakoff explores this unusual but not unique development in two cases of the utmost significance for World War II: the March 1933 decision by the German Reichstag to give power to Adolf Hitler to modify the Weimer constitution without further recourse to parliament, and the French National Assembly's decision in Vichy in July 1940 to transfer all state powers to Marshall Philippe Pétain.

Ermakoff has woven a fabric of many threads—some historical, some methodological, some theoretical—drawn together in complex patterns. His analysis begins by artfully turning what in many books would be a historiographical review of previous work into a deep and thorough consideration of three alternative explanations of abdication. First, it may be that social

actors engage in a self-defeating constitutional abdication because they fear
the consequences, either for themselves, for the group with which they iden-
tify, or for the general population. In essence, abdication is coerced, not vol-
untary. Second, actors fundamentally miscalculate: they do not fully know
what they are doing, or they misinterpret what they are doing by holding onto
some side bet that they will be able to reverse or ignore the act that turns out
to be constructed as abdication. Third, they are rational actors who hold cer-
tain interests aligned with the autocrat-in-waiting, and they engage in ideo-
logical (or perhaps other) collusion because they seek the benefits that they
believe will come with abdication, either for themselves, for their party, or
for their country. In assessing these explanations, Ermakoff does not totally
discount the possibility of some coercion, some miscalculation, some ideo-
logical or other political collusion, but he convincingly argues that in each
case—Germany in 1933, France in 1940—none of these explanations offers a
robust and adequate explanation of abdication.

   This extended critique of alternative explanations takes up the first half
of the book. Tellingly, each of the theories that Ermakoff evaluates amounts
to a factor explanation that operates in the frame of the "general linear
model" (82n; see also xxvii): a temporally *prior* general factor, x, causes a
temporally *subsequent* result, y. What, then, is the alternative? In place of
the three inadequate factor explanations, Ermakoff proposes an explanation
centered on trajectories of social interaction during the *unfolding* time of the
political process. In essence, he argues that the outcomes of abdication were
the consequences of processes of "collective alignment" (179). Acting under
threats of violence, politicians in each case faced a crucially important deci-
sion, because acquiescence would mean "institutionalizing arbitrary power"
(181).

   The worst outcome for any given politician, Ermakoff asserts, is *isola-
tion*, which exposes the individual to psychological trauma of self-doubt,
shunning by colleagues, questioning or even rejection by constituents, and
perhaps physical reprisals. Therefore, in these extreme conditions individual
members of a parliamentary body seek the protection of a collective deci-
sion, but they do so under conditions of mutual uncertainty: other colleagues
also are unsure how to respond to the extraordinary demands for abdication.
Collective alignment unfolds over the course of a few days, by way of three
interactive processes, when politicking occurs. First, in *sequential alignment*,
the decision of any individual—with a varying "threshold" of willingness to

join a wider group of people—is based on gaining knowledge of how a sufficient number of other people in a *reference group* intend to act, such that ego decides to join this emergent collective decision. Paradoxically, as Ermakoff argues, quoting Mark Granovetter, collective outcomes can be at odds with the "average level of preferences" (194). But this counterintuitive possibility does not imply some sort of emotional contagion; rather, it can be strictly a matter of calculation. Second, there is the matter of *local knowledge*. Sequential alignment depends on information, and local knowledge is thus one basis of it: people network with one another, gossip, exchange information, and, even though they do not always reveal their own preferences, mutually create bases for individuals' inferences about what others are doing. Third, *tacit coordination* occurs through the witnessing of events. Such witnessing either yields information in the form of a *signal*, the meaning of which is widely understood, or reveals strategic information that can be used to construct inference about climates of opinion and collective constructions of reality. Using these three axes of analysis, Ermakoff works through detailed analyses of the German and French cases, in each situation bringing to light the uncertainty and disarray that delegates faced, how they interpreted interactions with each other and public actions, and how these processes of collective alignment produced an outcome of constitutional abdication of constitutional power.

    Ruling Oneself Out is a sobering study, because it reveals micropolitical processes that may have perverse consequences, in the cases at hand, of the most extreme sort. It is a tour de force of analytic history. Ermakoff artfully blends different kinds of data: vote records, diaries, letters, verbal judicial testimonies, journals, and memoirs. Necessarily and effectively, he also blends different methodologies, notably quantitative analyses and hermeneutic investigations. Floating above these methods is an overarching exercise of analytic reasoning brought to bear on alternative historical explanations. With its range of methodologies and sources of data and its deep reasoning about diverse theoretical and substantive arguments over history, *Ruling Oneself Out* offers a compelling demonstration of the epistemological possibility of "translating" the stakes of arguments across different theoretical registers and substantive questions, in relation to the same broad historical events (Hall 1999: chap. 9). Ermakoff recognizes that evaluating different kinds of explanations about the "same" event may require different kinds of data and different time scales of analysis. His elaborate and intricate com

parative historical study of two similar events of abdication thus sets up the analytic questions and then nests multiple passes through "the history" in a series of examinations of each possible thesis, and possible subtheses and countertheses. His willingness to translate across theories and explanations that require looking at events in fundamentally alternative ways is rare and worthy of emulation.

The methodological construction of *Ruling Oneself Out* is highly sophisticated. I would be hard put to challenge any significant historical interpretation or theoretical claim in this study. There is, however, one *metamethodological* issue I will raise, because I think it important to be clear about the overall structure of Ermakoff's enterprise. In my view, there are two ways of reading the character of his argument in the present volume. They may be identified in relation to two alternative sociohistorical "practices of inquiry" among the eight such practices that I described in *Cultures of Inquiry* (Hall 1999): application of a theory and analytic generalization.

The more modest way of situating Ermakoff's book is as an initiative in the *application of a theory*. In this reading, *Ruling Oneself Out* shows the inadequacy of alternative explanations (coercion, miscalculation, ideological collusion) in a way that clears the field for alternative explanations. Yet strictly speaking, the process of collective alignment is not framed as an alternative explanation. Instead, the methodology is to "apply" or "demonstrate" the theory of collective alignment. In other words, what the second half of *Ruling Oneself Out* accomplishes is to show that the various processes of collective alignment (sequential alignment, local knowledge, tacit coordination) were indeed at work in the unfolding micropolitical processes in Germany in 1933 and France in 1940. We thus get to "see" the political process of collective alignment take place in the two countries. The application of the theory demonstrates its salience for bringing into view a significant dynamic in two extreme cases of political alignment. It thus strengthens our confidence in the theory as being one that is worthy of wider application, testing, and use in explanation.

However, a much stronger claim for the book would be that it develops an *analytic generalization* as a fully adequate basis for explaining *why* the parliaments in Germany and France abdicated their constitutional power. Clearly, Ermakoff has substantial interest in developing this kind of claim. He positions the collective alignment analysis as a response to other explanations that he shows to be inadequate, thus in effect advancing it as an alternative

explanation. Moreover, he devotes discussion at the conclusion of the book to delineating the scope conditions under which similar analyses could be made, thus positioning collective alignment as a theory capable of explaining comparable phenomena in diverse other settings, even beyond the bounds of formal political organizations.

I certainly concur that the relevance and significance of this book are considerable, given the central issue of abdication that it deals with and the fact that the analysis provides a much wider window on collective political processes. However, it does not seem to me that the theory of collective alignment offers a basis for a *full* explanation of these momentous events of abdication, and not just in the sense that no historical explanation can completely account for all actions and events. In a much more direct way, the collective alignment process takes as givens the leading movements of direction, the signals, and the implications of tacit coordination. Put differently, the processes of collective alignment depend on a *directionality* of alignment that cannot be generated from within the theory itself. Thus it is entirely plausible that collective alignment could lead in the opposite direction, toward a refusal of abdication, as, for example, it did among the Social Democrats in the 1933 German vote.

We are left, then, to ponder why the collective alignment process took the *direction* it took in these two cases. There are important clues relevant to this question throughout the book's analysis of collective alignment, for, as Ermakoff shows, in situation after situation a significant political leader signals that he will vote for the bill, or a delegate who might be expected to raise the flag of opposition with considerable credibility instead remains silent at a critical juncture. For example, in the Reichstag debate, the position of Ludwig Kaas is of obvious significance. And Ermakoff shows how in France, Pierre Laval orchestrated conditions promoting a favorable vote and notes the significance of the turnaround of Pierre-Etienne Flandin. These clues show why, in some immediate sense, collective alignments tipped in the directions they did, but, as Ermakoff points out, tipping points are not always irreversible; often they are tipping moments under conditions of instability such that timing is everything: another hour of debate and the whole process might have tipped back in the other direction.

We are thus thrust back to questions about the motives and actions of a series of principals in the political process: leaders and opinion leaders whose actions seem to hold substantial significance for how alignment unfolds.

Ermakoff explicitly acknowledges at the beginning that his analysis of collective alignment is oriented to the "rank and file," not to individuals of "prominence" (xxix). The study of the actions of the prominent politicians would require a scope beyond this book, and Ermakoff promises that it will be the subject of a subsequent study.

Thus Ermakoff in effect acknowledges that the account of collective alignment, powerful as it is as an application of theory, remains only part of an adequate explanation of abdication. We are left to anticipate his subsequent analysis and to wonder in the meantime whether there is an analytically generalizable explanation or whether even a highly talented historical sociologist will find generalization elusive in the specifics of these moments of history with such high stakes.

It is rare indeed for a book of social science history to make as strong a use of theory as Ermakoff has done. It is to his great credit that he has stayed true to the history—indeed, at a level of detail that "straight" historians only rarely reach these days. But it is even more to his credit that he has pursued a relentlessly analytic course that throws a strong light on an extreme puzzle of constitutional rule—abdication of power—and in the bargain brings to the fore in two historical cases a process of collective alignment over real time that has a broader salience both for understanding conditions that can produce the breakdown of constitutional rule and, more generally, for understanding the microdynamics of the political process. *Ruling Oneself Out* deserves to become a classic not only in social science history but also in political sociology, where we have seen all too few books in recent decades about the political process in democracy. On this subject, *Ruling Oneself Out* will fit very well on a shelf with Moisei Ostrogorski's *Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties* and Robert Michels's *Political Parties: A Sociological Study in the Oligarchic Tendencies of Modern Democracy*.

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Special Section:
Politics, Collective Uncertainty, and
the Renunciation of Power

Ivan Ermakoff

Motives and Alignments

Response to Kimeldorf's, Adut's, and Hall's Comments on
Ruling Oneself Out

Drawing on multiple perspectives and different analytic takes, Howard Kimeldorf's, Ari Adut's, and John R. Hall's comments raise three broad issues at the center of the agenda laid out in *Ruling Oneself Out*. The first issue concerns the motivational underpinnings of decisions reached in conditions of high uncertainty. The second draws the focus on the logic of the argument and its possible connections with models of organizational behaviors. The third points to the explanatory scope of the theory and the indeterminacy of the processes at play. In this article I address these critical remarks and, along the way, stake out claims and implications.

On Motivational Underpinnings

An argument about decisions cannot avoid delving into motivations and subjective perceptions. Several of Ari Adut's and Howard Kimeldorf's com-

ments focus on this issue. Adut draws attention to the possible effects of coercive pressures and pervasive expectations of retaliation in July 1940. In addition, his comments suggest that we should not downplay the significance of opportunism as a motive for endorsement. Kimeldorf for his part calls for a shift in analytic focus: instead of treating fear, misjudgment, and ideological collusion as three separate motives, the relevant matrix is a mixed one that combines all three. These comments raise important empirical and analytic points. I address each in turn.

Pressures and the Prospect of Doom

Is there ground to argue that in July 1940 those who voted no did so because they expected to be punished regardless of their vote, as Adut suggests? And would it help to know how many of these dissenters were arrested subsequently? Both in 1933 and in 1940 actors on the spot were those who had prominence as a result of their past responsibilities. The decision to repress them often reflected political priorities directly geared to the imperative of power consolidation. The Vichy leadership, for instance, decided to intern and prosecute several prominent politicians of the French Third Republic for their alleged responsibility in the military disaster. This measure targeted actors who had not taken part in the vote (Edouard Daladier, Georges Mandel), actors who had abstained (Paul Reynaud), and actors who had opposed the power transfer (Léon Blum, Jules Moch). As for less visible parliamentarians who had dissented in July 1940, they could peacefully live throughout the period without being bothered if state leaders did not perceive them as opponents.[1]

It is therefore unclear whether subsequent measures of repression can help us assess the motivational significance of coercive pressures at the time of the decision. There can be considerable discrepancy between actors' beliefs regarding future retaliations and what happens to them subsequently. The focus on subsequent arrests, furthermore, raises a methodological issue: when we invoke ex post events to back up claims about beliefs that hypothetically anticipated these events, implicitly or not, the approach becomes backward-looking and prone to retrospective selection biases prompting the deduction of antecedents from outcomes. In this book I adopt the actors' standpoint. As a result, the perspective is forward-looking.

Still, could it be that those who voted no did so because "they knew (or

thought) that they would be punished in the new regime regardless of their vote" (Adut)? This claim rests on two assumptions: those who oppose the power transfer are certain to lose—they will be in the minority—or they believe that whatever the outcome of the vote, it will have no impact on the challenger's political capacity. Both assumptions are problematic. Opponents were not certain to lose until the very end. Furthermore, in July 1940 the universe of subsequent events and their likelihoods depended very much on the vote. Had Pierre Laval been rebuffed, the prospect of a state aligned with Nazi Germany would have lost much of its substance.

Consider the following remark by Léon Blum (1955: 86–87): "Was the risk of being jailed quite real? Was [this threat] any different than a bogey-man for weak hearts? Laval could maybe take his revenge on some isolated dissenters. But could he throw a few hundred deputies and senators in jail on the same evening? All we had to do to render him *powerless* was to stand firm, join forces en masse and in close order" (my emphasis).[2] Blum's assessment is not an isolated one (see, e.g., Galimand 1948: 62). The opponents' memoirs and personal accounts do not reveal a sense of doom from the moment the confrontation took place.

Clearly, those who in 1938–39 had advocated resisting Adolf Hitler's blackmails—the so-called bellicists—knew that they were particularly exposed to the wrath of the former "appeasers," chief among them Laval. The greater the bellicists' visibility, the greater their exposure. Yet there is no evidence that when the dice seemed cast for all those present, opponents clinched to their choice because they expected to be retaliated against what-ever their stance. Some clearly had reasons to feel threatened as a result of their past positions. In adopting a low profile, they could expect to redeem themselves in the eyes of the new power holders. Reynaud abstained as well as several of Blum's affiliates.

The prospect of a loss in terms of status, career, and personal welfare can be enough to motivate repentance or collaboration.[3] The range of options entertained by the delegates of the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD; German Social Democratic Party) is a case in point. When parlia-ment convened during the third week of March 1933, the delegates who were not prevented from attending the session—94 out of 120 newly elected dele-gates—traveled to Berlin. Given the blatant Nazi violence vis-à-vis those castigated as "Marxists," the resolution of the latter revealed considerable willingness to take risks. Still, some delegates proposed that the delegation as

a whole shun the vote or abstain. They had taken significant risks up to that point. They were now considering a collective way out of the confrontation.[4]

Underlying these observations is a broader point. The coercion argument is always true *in retrospect* for those who abandon themselves to fear and yield to pressures. But it is true only for these actors. Groups facing comparable coercive constraints react differently to the prospect of bearing high costs because of their stance. The clue to this variation lies in the collective process whereby actors appraise and make sense of the threats. Do they endorse them as a motivation for fear? Do they experience them as a despicable attempt to debase their integrity? By themselves, threats do not produce fear, especially if they are directed at a collective.

Hence there is no clear-cut correlation between coercion and subservience. Very significant threats can fail to produce their intended effects. Conversely, uncertainty may become pervasive even though the element of threat is a moot one to begin with. The striking point about July 1940 is how dubious threats and rumors were. They were rumors in the full sense of the term: vague, unsubstantiated, and free-floating. They were "fabrications." A sober examination could "reduce them to dust" (Blum 1955: 85). Hence the credence that some actors lent to them requires explanation.[5] By contrast, in March 1933 threats and intimidation were very real. Here it is the collective decision not to yield to pressures that requires explanation.

Opportunistic Collusion

Were there opportunists in these groups? The answer is a definite yes. This observation should not surprise us. These collective conjunctures are relatively open with regard to the range of their possible outcomes: institutional patterns are disrupted or break down. Some positions will be freed up. Those with an eye for opportunities are likely to make their bet. As Blum (1955: 83) observes in his recollections on the event, "Any political revolution arouses a scramble for spoils."[6] In July 1940 it is not so difficult to identify these opportunists. They publicize their stance and make themselves visible by ostensibly professing their support for Laval's proposal.

Is this to say that political opportunism was the modal attitude? Both in July 1940 and in March 1933 the answer this time is no. The suggestion that opportunistic collusion might have been prevalent stumbles against observations documenting widespread uncertainty. Those seeking to grab their

chance were a tiny minority. There is nothing surprising in this observation. A challenge calling into question a group's sense of identity and interests is likely initially to elicit dispositions at both ends of the moral integrity spectrum: opportunistic ambitions, on the one hand, moral integrity cast in ideological terms, on the other, and, in the middle, considerable normative confusion. Parliamentarians were at a loss. The prevailing feeling, punctuated by the ebbs and flows of collective swings in mood, was not the prospect of a good bet but the realization that bearings had been let loose.

These observations do not rule out the possibility that, past the initial shock and confusion, a collusive stance would become the mode. In this sequence, opportunism emerges in parallel to the prospect of accommodation. Some Catholic groups underwent this process in the spring of 1933, convincing themselves that Germany was on the verge of a national revival, that they could reach a modus vivendi with Hitler, and that for German Catholics the time for collaboration had come. This reappraisal meant a radical reconsideration of the Nazi agenda. Similarly, as Adut underscores, the Vichy state did not lack support among civil servants and politicians who previously had been staunch supporters of republican institutions. This shift in stance, however, brings us back to the collective processes whereby group members construct their representation of the future and rationalize their decision. The issue, then, is to account for the gradual emergence of a collective stance that homogenizes dispositions. This brings me to the second objection regarding motivations.

Mixed Motives

Kimeldorf is right: in problematic and challenging situations, the realm of motives is unlikely to be pure. Individuals blend emotional strands of various sorts as they go through events. They blend fear, hope, and misjudgment. They switch from one state of mind to the other. Narratives focusing on the moment of decision portray actors beset with reasons conflicting with one another. Rudolf Morsey (1977: 144) provides an evocative description of this maelstrom of subjective dispositions in the case of the Center Party parliamentary delegates. As these delegates faced the prospect of their own collective decision, negative assessments inextricably colored positive ones. These delegates contradicted their own beliefs. They expected violence yet believed that state responsibilities would tame Nazi radicalism.

I do not dispute this point. Rather, I ask: What does this ambivalence tell us about the mode of decision at play in these conjunctures? This question brings several observations to the fore (chap. 10). First, actors do not host contradictory reasons at once. They shift from one to the other. This explains the frailty of their opinions, their emotional instability, and their apparent lack of resolution. Second, these fluctuations, which mirror the instability of the conjuncture, have a temporality of their own. When this temporality is collective, conflicting reasons underscore the prevalence of a mode of decision marked by heteronomy: the individual actor relies on others to figure out which line of conduct to adopt. Third, actors overcome their oscillations by adopting an interpretive frame that makes sense of the choice they are making. In so doing, they subsume different emotional states to this interpretive frame. Fourth, the credibility of this frame rests on the shoulders of those whom the individual actors define as peers. The frame is plausible insofar as it has collective credentials.

If ambivalence is so significant, what, then, is the purpose of separating out fear, misjudgment, and ideological collusion (chaps. 3–5)? The purpose is analytic. Fear, misjudgment, and collusion underlie the common sense of abdication. Hence we are bound to encounter them again and again under the guise of reasonable objections. When one appears problematic, the other two step forward as plausible alternatives. It is this common sense that deserves close attention. We need to know the argumentative logic of each one of these motivational claims to figure out where they stand in the universe of possible explanations. Laying bare these argumentative logics, their implications, and their factual validity is the subject of chapters 3–5.

The Logic of the Theory

Kimeldorf prods further the internal consistency of the framework by asking, first, how the three alignment processes that constitute the bases of the theory relate to one another and, second, how this framework departs from the scholarship on organizations. For the sake of clarity, let me typify each process. (1) *Sequential alignment*: actors observe how many others choose one option and make their choices when this number reaches a level that they deem motivationally appropriate. This level is the actor's "threshold" (Granovetter 1978: 1422). (2) *Local knowledge*: people interact face-to-face with one another, exchange information about their preferences, and infer

the group preference from this information. (3) *Tacit coordination*: people infer the group preference from events that are public knowledge under the assumption that they share the same inference.

Behavioral and Inferential Alignments

These are generic processes of alignment. They imply that individual actors make their choices conditional on the behavior of others. One way to address Kimeldorf's question is to examine conditions of possibility: Under which conditions are these processes likely to take place? Can we specify conditional factors? For sequential alignment to occur, two conditions need to be met. First, individuals must have the time to observe others opt for a line of conduct. Second, the distribution of individual thresholds must be such that all those facing the same decision will be motivated to take a stance and will motivate others to do so (Granovetter 1978: 1424). It may be that not enough people take a stand to motivate others. When the sequence stops, individuals who have not yet made their choices lack the information to do so. The process is interrupted.

Local knowledge becomes a basis for inference when individuals do reveal their preferences as they informally interact with one another. They may, however, refuse to do so if they view the decision as risky. More plausibly, they may simply disclose their uncertainty. Consequently, in the process of probing one another actors end up conveying a sense of loss and confusion to one another. Uncertainty feeds mutual uncertainty. Irresolution prevails. Actors form no representation of the group preference. Rather, they gauge a sense of group indeterminacy (200–201).

As for tacit coordination, the issue is whether people can reasonably believe that they share the same assessment of their collective preference given their common knowledge. *Ruling Oneself Out* relates this scenario to the conditional impact of public statements. Statements that are public reveal a group preference if people have a good sense of a speaker's propensity to make his or her stance conditional on the stance of the group. Then group members can infer his or her assessment of the collective stance, and they can assume that this inference is shared. The possibility of tacit coordination in this case hinges on the public profile of the speaker. If he or she is anonymous, this inference process cannot take place (205–9).

Once these conditions of possibility have been specified, the relationship

among these three alignment processes becomes clearer. First, we should draw a contrast between behavioral and inferential alignment. Sequential alignment is a behavioral process. Local knowledge and tacit coordination, by contrast, are processes based on an inference (182). Inferential alignment becomes relevant when people cannot or are not willing to commit themselves, that is, when sequential alignment stops or does not take place. The implication of this analysis is that situations of mutual uncertainty are particularly prone to inferential processes of alignment.

What about the relationship between local knowledge and tacit coordination? These two processes can reinforce one another (202). If so, the information communicated through interpersonal contacts corroborates the inference derived from public events. These two processes can also contradict one another. What happens in this case? I argue that tacit coordination has precedence. The argument is one of scope (356–62). Actors know that their local knowledge is confined to their interpersonal contacts and that, as a result, this knowledge may be heavily biased if the sample thus constituted is not representative. By contrast, the information provided by public statements—under the conditions I specified earlier—is assumed to be shared by all group members. The coordinating power of this information is therefore greater than local knowledge, and actors know it.

Leadership and Coordination in Organizations

These few remarks help me address Kimeldorf's additional question: how does this framework relate to analyses devoted to issues of coordination in organizations? As reference points, I will consider two approaches to organizational processes. One pays attention to the significance of shared and self-sustaining beliefs informing actors' understanding of patterns of transaction (Aoki 2001: 10). Providing structure to interactions and expectations, these shared beliefs define the rules of the game. Actors make their choices and deal with uncertainty within the confines of well-established behavioral scripts. A second approach conceptualizes leadership as the device that makes cooperation possible and enhances a group's capacity to act (Calvert 1992; Miller 1994). "Leaders are needed because of . . . their ability to solve problems of coordination" (Calvert 1992: 7).

Ruling Oneself Out complements these analytic foci in three respects. First, this book investigates situations of high disruption: situations that blur

and challenge the very notion of the "rules of the game." In these conjunctures, expectations geared to these rules are open to question. Habitual and institutional patterns of behaviors have lost their phenomenological relevance, which means that the repertoire of symbolic and behavioral scripts constituting the culture of the organization or the group suddenly becomes a black hole. The processes of alignment analyzed in this book lay the ground for the emergence of new scripts informed by behavioral choices.

Second, organizational studies of leadership and coordination start with the premise of an organizational setting in which positions of leadership are already clearly defined. Institutional positions are endowed with the formal features of executive power. Leaders provide coordination because they are acknowledged as holding these positions. Thus this literature offers an account of leadership that already assumes its existence. By contrast, the argument about inferential (tacit) alignment developed in *Ruling Oneself Out* makes no reference to such positions per se. Prominent actors may or may not hold positions of institutional leadership. What makes these actors agents of coordination is their prominence, which I define as visibility plus resonance (207–8).

Third—and related to the previous point—arguments focused on the coordinating quality of leadership emphasize its functional character. These arguments start with a situation in which group members already acknowledge some actors as leaders and then explain why this leadership function is beneficial to the group. "[The] overarching problem [of coordination] generally requires leadership—that is, it requires that some individual regularly suggest actions to be taken by group members, and that those suggestions be voluntarily followed" (Calvert 1992: 8). Implicit in these arguments is the hypothesis that positions of leadership come into existence because they are required for the continuing existence of the group. *Ruling Oneself Out* makes no claim of that kind. Rather, the focus is on the cognitive and collective underpinnings of this coordination when it is not institutionalized.

Explanatory Scope

I now address the issue of the scope and the status of the inquiry. Shall *Ruling Oneself Out* be primarily interpreted as an attempt to show the relevance of the theory of collective alignment applied to two highly consequential events? Or does it engage in an exercise of "analytic generalization" (Hall 1999: 193)?

As John R. Hall points out, both readings are possible. The second reading, however, raises the question of the scope of the theory and its explanatory power. It is unclear whether the theory can explain the direction of the process and therefore can predict the outcome. Adut raises a consonant point: without reference to coercion or collusive opportunities, the argument cannot predict the behavior of prominent actors. To this objection, my response is two-pronged.

Indeterminacy

First, we cannot fully comprehend these events without recognizing their indeterminate character. This in turn requires identifying and theorizing the contributing factors that make such conjunctures indeterminate. Mutual uncertainty is the first factor. Insofar as the members of the group under challenge make their choices conditional on one another's and realize that they face the same uncertainty, the collective conjuncture is open-ended. It can go one way or another. The group as such does not hold the clue to its own irresolution. In these conditions, happenings that in other circumstances would remain insignificant—an absence, a silence, a few words stated on the spot, or even a lapse—can have decisive consequences (Ermakoff 2001: 255–56). This analysis spells out the notion of historical contingency.

   An additional contributing factor concerns the conditions under which mutual uncertainty is likely to extend to prominent actors, thereby trapping them in the same dilemma as the rank and file. This scenario is all the more likely when prominent actors are uncertain about their status in the group. They do not know whether they will be able to retain any modicum of prominence as a result of the stance they take. Groups that traditionally lack cohesion are conducive to this type of uncertainty. But even cohesive groups can be the settings of status uncertainty when there are signs that the group might split.

   Under these conditions, as Hall rightly underscores, the theory cannot predict the direction of the process from an exogenous standpoint. It can set forth predictions regarding the likely outcome of the process depending on the content of public statements writ large, the identities of those who turn out to be focal points, and the sequence constituted by these public statements (366–68). These claims define the scope of the arguments about indeterminacy and alignment. As such, they are of theoretical relevance to analyzing the dynamics of collective situations characterized by these conditions.

One qualification is in order. This argument does not imply that abdication necessarily sanctions mutual uncertainty. Nor does it imply that prominent actors ultimately and necessarily determine the outcome. If the process is sequential, these actors have little to say. Events take place outside of their purview. No one is waiting for them. They can be left aside. Similarly, local knowledge points to a process of inference independent of the stances taken by prominent actors. If time allows, actors form a representation of the group based on whatever pieces of information they acquire through interpersonal contacts. This decentralized and informal process is likely to prevail when communication is disrupted and prominent actors are not in a position either to be visible or to reveal their stances.

The Game of Prominence

Can we, then, predict the behavior of prominent actors who are *not* engulfed in the dilemma of mutual uncertainty? This question, motivated by Adut's comments, points to the second prong of my response. Here we are considering prominent actors who assume their prominence, that is, actors who do not seek refuge in some form of wait-and-see attitude. I argue that these individuals assume their prominence insofar as they believe that they can commit the stance of a group. For these actors, the range of possible options is quite different from the choice options available to the rank and file. Prominent actors who assume their prominence are involved in multiple games at once. First, they can bargain their defection to the challenger, all the more so when their position is pivotal. Second, they are involved in a game that hinges on the possibility of cooperation. Finally, given the stakes of such conjunctures, they have to reassert their prominent status vis-à-vis the rank and file.

The factors affecting the dynamics of these games and their interrelations are of different kinds. To spell them out and disentangle their effects, it is necessary to investigate patterns of political competition, their legacies, and the possibility of their demise, as well as how ideological conceptions of group interests play out in such conjunctures. As I indicate in the preface (xxix), developing a systematic analysis of these factors is a different endeavor from the one expounded in *Ruling Oneself Out*. This will be the focus of another book—titled *The Game of Prominence*—that complements and expands the theory of collective alignment.

Notes

1   Actually, Vichy did not specifically target the 80 parliamentarians who voted no on July 10, 1940. Some were deprived of their mandate as mayor, if they had one. But this measure concerned all those suspected of opposing the Vichy state.

2   "Mais au surplus, le risque était-il bien réel; s'agissait-il d'autre chose que d'un épouvantail pour les cœurs débiles? Laval exercerait peut-être sa vengeance sur quelques réfractaires isolés, mais jetterait-il en prison le soir du vote quelques centaines de sénateurs et de députés? Il suffisait de tenir bon, de lui faire front en masse serrée, pour le réduire à l'impuissance" (Blum 1955: 86–87).

3   For instance, in a letter to a party colleague dated August 11, 1933, Johannes Gross, a former member of the Center Party delegation, explicitly acknowledges that concerns for his future and the future of his family, among other things, motivate his willingness to be "guest delegate" (*Hospitant*) on the Nazi Party's parliamentary list in the summer of 1933 (Nachlaß August Wegmann, I-366).

4   This option was debated in a delegation meeting and is narrated by several former SPD parliamentary delegates (Buchwitz 1950: 149; Hoegner 1959: 92, 1978: 129; Felder 1982: 37).

5   See Michèle Cointet's (1993: 36) broad remark regarding July 1940: "It is doubtful that objective reasons for fear were present in this charming spa town. . . . [This explanation] refers more to cultural projections than to tangible threats, and more to a posteriori justifications than to determining motivations."

6   "Toute révolution politique excite une curée" (Blum 1955: 83).

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