

Key Concepts in the Social Sciences

POWER

Its Forms, Bases and Uses

DENNIS H. WRONG

BASIL BLACKWELL · OXFORD

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Preface

I first became interested in the problem of how to conceptualize the elusive but indispensable notion of power in the early 1960s in connection with two debates that were going on among sociologists and political scientists at that time. At the level of empirical research, the study of the distribution of power in local communities gave rise to disagreements over whether a 'reputational' or a 'decisional' method provided the best answers to the query 'who runs this town?' More unambiguously conceptual and theoretical issues were raised by the confrontation in sociology between Talcott Parsons and C. Wright Mills and their supporters over whether power should be viewed primarily as a general social resource or as the instrument by which some groups promoted and secured their interests at the expense of other groups. This last debate was closely tied in with arguments between functionalists and conflict theorists, the former tending towards a consensual view of power as legitimate authority, the latter disposed to insist on the irreducibly coercive face of power.

These debates no longer preoccupy sociologists and political scientists in the terms in which they were first presented, although they can scarcely be said to have been resolved in the favour of either side, something that in any case rarely happens in social theory. However, they have become points of reference in contemporary discussions of structuralist as opposed to actionist theories of society, rival elucidations of the nature of group and class interests, and interpretations of the role of ideologies in shaping as well as reflecting collective world-views. I have therefore often chosen in this book to introduce topics by summarizing the debates of the 1960s while at the same time making an effort to show their relevance to and continuity with current theoretical controversies. I have also, however, in accordance with my own disposition to doubt the superiority of new to

old wisdom, tried to ground my discussions in the reflections of classical political theorists, especially Aristotle, Machiavelli and Hobbes, as well as those of Dostoevsky, Freud and George Orwell. Power is too important a subject to be left to contemporary social theorists.

I have much appreciated the careful and prompt editorial attention given the manuscript by Bryan Wilson, the editor of the series of which it is part. Edward W. Lehman and Steven Lukes read nearly complete drafts and I am grateful to both of them for their trouble and for the many helpful suggestions they made; also to Eliot Freidson for his similar service with respect to part of Chapter 3. I received useful criticisms and suggestions from colleagues and students at various universities in Britain, Canada and the United States where I presented parts of the manuscript in seminars or lectures. My wife, Jacqueline, graciously allowed me to use her as a sounding-board for several ideas as well as for some of the prose included in the book.

I should like to thank the Warden and Fellows of Nuffield College, Oxford University for their hospitality in providing me as a Visiting Fellow with such comfortable and intellectually stimulating surroundings in which to complete the book in the spring and early summer of 1978. I am also indebted to the members of the Department of Sociology of the University of Manchester for their courtesies to me during a stay there in March 1978 as a Simon Visiting Professor. Last but not least, I am grateful to New York University for its generous sabbatical leave policy.

I should like to thank Columbia University Press for permission to reprint in Chapters 1–3 and 5 material that previously appeared in *Skeptical Sociology*, 1976

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CHAPTER ONE

Problems in Defining Power

The most general use of the word 'power' in English is as a synonym for capacity, skill, or talent. This use encompasses the capacity to engage in certain kinds of performance, or 'skill' in the strict sense, the capacity to produce an effect of some sort on the external world, and the physical or psychological energies underlying any and all human performances – the 'power to act' itself, as it were. Sometimes the word is used in the plural to denote the total capacities and energies – or 'faculties' – of a human being, as in reference to the increasing or failing 'powers' of a person. When power refers to the energies released by human actions, it merges into the physical concept of energy as the capacity to do work or to move matter, as in steam or electrical power. Applied in this sense to human energies, power is equated with *potency*, or an actor's general ability to produce successful performances.

The notion of controlling or acting on resistant materials is implicit in the idea of power as skill or capacity. Some writers have equated power in this general sense with *mastery*, or with the ability 'to produce observed modifications in the external world'.¹ In the case of complex physical or mental skills, the recalcitrant materials to be mastered are the actor's own body and mind rather than objects in the external environment. The actor exercises a power over himself that we usually call 'self-discipline' or 'self-control'. Freudian writers, beginning with Freud himself, habitually employ political metaphors to describe intrapsychic processes: the 'tyrannical' superego, the 'imperious' id, the 'bargaining' or 'compromising' ego.

Power as potency and, though less unambiguously, as mastery is unmistakably a 'dispositional' term in Gilbert Ryle's sense, referring not to an actual performance but to the capacity, latent in the actor even when not being exercised, to produce a particular kind of performance.² When we are concerned with power as a social relation between actors, it is important, as I shall argue in more detail below, to retain the

dispositional sense of the term, although the sociological concept of power must not imply that it is an attribute of an actor rather than a relation between actors, whether individuals or groups.

Two famous British philosophers, separated by nearly three centuries, defined power similarly. Thomas Hobbes defined it as 'man's present means to any future apparent good',³ while to Bertrand Russell, power was 'the production of intended effects'.⁴ Hobbes's definition is clearly a dispositional one, for a man may obviously possess the means to attain a future good even when he is not engaged in employing them to that end. Russell's definition, however, lends itself to being understood as 'episodic'⁵ rather than dispositional unless one adds the phrase 'the capacity for' in front of 'the production of intended effects'.

But both definitions identify power with potency or mastery and are therefore too general if one's interest is in power as a social relationship, for both cover power over the self and over nature as well as the power of men over other men. Self-mastery is, of course, a major subject for psychology, especially for psychoanalysis, but it is distinguishable from social and political power relations among individuals and groups. The relation between power over nature and power over men is also a highly important subject on which Russell made a number of acute observations over forty years ago, before the advent of computers and nuclear weapons.⁶ Nowadays it is a fashionable topic among left-wing intellectuals alarmed by the possibility that the new technical and scientific intelligentsia constitutes a technocratic elite menacing human freedom.⁷ However, political and social theory requires a more restricted definition to differentiate power over nature from power over men.

Although there are hundreds, perhaps thousands, of more recent definitions of social power, or of the power of men over other men, in the literature of social science, I see no reason why we should not make do with older, simpler definitions so long as they are intellectually adequate. I shall therefore adopt a modified version of Russell's definition: *Power is the capacity of some persons to produce intended and foreseen effects on others.*⁸ The terms in this definition require detailed analysis to show how they cope with major problems and confusions in the conceptual analysis of power. There are five such problems. First, there is the issue of the *intentionality* of power, and secondly, of its *effectiveness*. The *latency* of power, its dispositional nature to which I have already alluded, is a third problem. The unilateral or asymmetrical nature of power relations implied by the

claim that some persons have an effect on others without a parallel claim that the reverse may also be the case is a fourth issue, to be discussed below as the problem of *asymmetry and balance* in power relations. A final question is that of *the nature of the effects produced* by power: must they be overt and behavioural, or do purely subjective, internal effects count also?

The Intentionality of Power

People exercise mutual influence and control over one another's conduct in all social interaction – in fact, that is what we mean by social interaction. It is essential, therefore, to distinguish between the exercise of power and social control in general – otherwise there would be no point in employing power as a separate concept or in identifying power relations as a distinct kind of social relation. That social control is inherent in all social interaction – at least, in all recurrent or 'patterned' social interaction – has been clearly recognized by contemporary sociologists, though some of them have minimized the degree to which resistance to the demands and expectations of others also pervades human social life. Moreover, actors nearly always belong to a larger group or community the norms and values of which they share. Even if it is often overemphasized, the influence of group norms in shaping individual conduct is a basic assumption of modern social science. If norms are the prevailing rules of conduct in a group, and are enforced by positive or negative sanctions, then does not all normatively regulated social behaviour involve power exercised by the group over the individual? Individuals, to be sure, undergo a process of socialization in the course of which they internalize many group norms. When social controls have been internalized, the concept of power as a social relation is clearly inapplicable, but to assume that most conformity to norms is the result of internalization is to adopt what I have called an 'over-socialized conception of man'.⁹ Moreover, the power of the parent over the child precedes the child's internalization of parental rules; the child's superego is formed by his identification with the parents, whose commands the child eventually issues to himself without reference to their original external source. Submission to power is thus the earliest and most formative experience in human life. As R. G. Collingwood (no Freudian, to the best of my knowledge) put it:

A man is born a red and wrinkled lump of flesh having no will of its own at all, absolutely at the mercy of the parents by whose conspiracy he has

been brought into existence. That is what no science of human community . . . must ever forget.¹⁰

But if to collapse the concept of power into that of social control is to vitiate all need for a separate concept of power, it then becomes necessary to distinguish the diffuse controls exercised by the group over socialized individuals from direct, intentional efforts by a specific person or group to affect another's conduct. Power is identical with *intended* and effective influence. It is one of two subcategories of *influence*, the other, empirically larger subcategory consisting of acts of *unintended* influence. In contrast to several recent writers, I do not see how we can avoid restricting the term power to intentional and effective acts of influence by some persons on other persons. It may be readily acknowledged that intentional efforts to influence others often produce unintended as well as intended effects on their behaviour – a dominating and overprotective mother does not intend to feminize the character of her son. But all social interaction produces such unintended effects – a boss does not mean to plunge an employee into despair by greeting him somewhat distractedly in the morning, nor does a woman mean to arouse a man's sexual interest by paying polite attention to his conversation at a cocktail party. The effects others have on us, unintended by and even unknown to them, may influence us more profoundly and permanently than direct efforts to control our sentiments and behaviour. Dahl and Lindblom call such unintended influence 'spontaneous field control' and sharply distinguish it from forms of deliberate control.¹¹

The distinction between intentional and unintentional effects on others may seem to be hairsplitting. Does not the elephant who dances with the chickens exercise a power of life and death over them even though he has no wish to trample them underfoot? Do not the acts of governments today shape and destroy the lives of millions even though these outcomes in no way were intended or even foreseen by shortsighted statesmen? Yet rather than equate power with all forms of influence, unintended as well as intended, it seems preferable to stress the fact that the intentional control of others is likely to create a relationship in which the power holder exercises unintended influence over the power subject that goes far beyond what he may have wished or envisaged at the outset.

To revert to a precious example: it is only because a mother exercises socially approved power over her children that she may unintentionally

shape their personalities along lines that are repugnant to her and defeat her most cherished hopes. So to confine the term 'power' to the exercise of intentional control is not to make power less important or less pervasive in history and society. The study of the unintended consequences of social action may well be one of the major tasks of the social sciences,¹² but this does not preclude the necessity of carefully distinguishing between outcomes that are intended and those that are not.

Intentionality is often understood to include all outcomes that are anticipated or foreseen by the actor. But there is a difference between acting in order to achieve a certain outcome and recognizing that other effects will unavoidably result from the action which are incidental to the outcome sought by the actor.¹³ These anticipated but unintended byproducts of the action may from the actor's standpoint be regarded as inconsequential, as undesirable in themselves but a price worth paying to attain the end for which the action was undertaken, or as secondary gains insufficiently attractive to justify undertaking the action. However, so long as the effects were foreseen by the actor even if not aimed at as such, they constitute an exercise of power in contrast to unanticipated (and by definition unintended) effects. There are, of course, borderline cases where the degree to which the actor may have foreseen certain consequences of his action is in doubt. Such cases often turn up in the courts where the legal assessment of responsibility is at issue. They tend to be decided according to a standard of what the actor might 'reasonably' have expected to have a given probability of happening as a result of his action; for example, the occurrence of a train accident during a brief interval when the railway signalman left his post. The difficulty of deciding in some cases just what probability an actor must have, or should have, ascribed to an unintended outcome for it to count as an expected or foreseen effect must be acknowledged. But an adequate definition of power cannot ignore the difference between intended and unintended but foreseen effects. Intention itself is, after all, sometimes legally problematical.

The Effectiveness of Power

When attempts to exercise power over others are unsuccessful, when the intended effects of the aspiring power-wielder are not in fact produced, we are confronted with an absence or a failure of power. We do not ascribe power over heavenly bodies to Chanticleer the cock, who

believed that his crowing caused the sun to rise; this was merely a delusion of power on his part. When in *Henry IV, Part I* Owen Glendower boasts 'I can call spirits from the vasty deep' and Hotspur replies sceptically 'Why, so can I, or so can any man; But will they come when you do call for them?' Hotspur is questioning the reality of Glendower's power over the spirits, or perhaps the very existence of a spirit world. When an attempted exercise of power fails, although similar attempts may have been successful in the past, we witness the breakdown of the power relation. The effectiveness of power would seem to be so obvious a criterion for its presence as to preclude any need for further discussion.

The Latency of Power, or the Actual/Potential Problem

Power is often defined as a capacity to control or influence others. I have already briefly referred to some of the implications of so defining it: the capacity to perform acts of control and their actual performance are clearly not the same thing – power when thought of as a capacity is a dispositional concept. What Gilbert Ryle says about 'knowing' and 'aspiring' also applies to power conceived of as a capacity to control others:

To say that a person knows something, is not to say that he is at a particular moment in process of doing or undergoing anything, but that he is able to do certain things, when the need arises, or that he is prone to do and feel certain things in situations of certain sorts.¹⁴

Ryle calls verbs such as 'to know', 'to aspire', and 'to possess' *dispositional* words that refer to recurrent tendencies of human beings to behave in certain ways, in contrast to the *episodic* words we employ to refer to specific behavioural events. The distinction between 'having power' and 'exercising power' reflects the difference between viewing power as a dispositional and as an episodic concept.¹⁵ Unfortunately, power lacks a common verb form, which in part accounts for the frequent tendency to see it as a mysterious property or agency resident in the person or group to whom it is attributed. The use of such terms as 'influence' and 'control', which are both nouns and verbs, as virtual synonyms for power, represents an effort (not necessarily fully conscious) to avoid the suggestion that power is a property rather than a relation.¹⁶

The evidence that a person or group possesses the capacity to control others may be the frequency with which successful acts of control have been carried out in the past. Thus it makes perfect sense to say that the king or president still 'has' power even when he is asleep in his bed (though not if there has been a successful insurrection since he retired, and armed rebels are guarding the door to his bedroom). Or power may be imputed to an actor when the probability of his intending to achieve and effectively achieving control over another actor is rated high, even though he may not have previously exercised such control.

However, this sense in which power is latent or dispositional is sometimes confused with another, or at least the distinction between them is blurred. Power is sometimes said to be potential rather than actual, to be 'possessed' without being 'exercised', when others carry out the wishes or intentions of the power holder without his ever actually having issued a command to them or even having interacted with them at all to communicate his aims. Carl Friedrich has called such cases 'the rule of anticipated reactions'.¹⁷ Obviously, they differ from a situation in which there may be a considerable time lag between the issuance of a command and compliance with it; to my knowledge, no one has ever regarded such a situation as anything other than an instance of actual, exercised power in view of man's 'time-binding' capacities enabling him to orient himself simultaneously to past, present and future events.

The ruler may be asleep in bed while his subjects are not merely engaged in carrying out directives he gave them before retiring but making decisions and taking actions based on their anticipations of what he would wish them to do in the relevant circumstances. It is this that is often called 'latent' or 'potential' power, as distinct from 'manifest' or 'actual' power where observable communications are transmitted and acted upon. Clearly, more is involved in such cases than the previously described situation where the ruler may be said to 'have' power while asleep in the sense that he has an unimpaired capacity to issue commands in the expectation that they will be obeyed. Both cases, however, seem to me to indicate essential attributes of all power relationships. In this sense Robert Bierstedt is entirely correct in maintaining that 'it may seem redundant to say so, but power is always potential'.¹⁸

But imputations of power based on the 'anticipated reactions' of the power subject confront a number of difficulties. For A's power over B to be real when it is not actually exercised, B must be convinced of A's

capacity to control him and must modify his behaviour accordingly. Thus a mother has power over her child when the child refrains from doing something in anticipation of her displeasure even when the mother is not present to issue a specific prohibition. Similarly, the president has power over Congress when congressional leaders decide to shelve a bill in anticipation of a presidential veto. The consciousness of the power subject is a crucial consideration in imputations of power on the basis of anticipated reactions. Max Weber's conception of power as 'the probability that one actor in a social relationship will . . . carry out his own will'¹⁹ may be interpreted as attributing the estimate of probability to the judgement of the power subject and not merely to that of the observer, say a social scientist. Otherwise, only overt acts of control or the subsequent imposition of a sanction after the performance of an act would validate an imputation of power made by an observer, and the distinction between latent and manifest power disappears.

When power is regarded as a capacity, therefore, and when it is understood to include B's acts based on his anticipations of A's reaction to them, the distinction between latent and manifest, or potential and actual, power is implicit in the very definition of power. Yet even when empirical students of power define it as a capacity, they frequently ignore the implications of such a definition in practice by treating power as identical with its actual exercise and confining themselves to its manifestations in directly observable act-response sequences.²⁰ Other writers define power in such a way as to require the overt performance of an act by an imputed power holder that precedes the response of the power subject, thus excluding B's anticipatory responses from the realm of power relations. Actual participation in decision-making or observed 'initiation of interaction for others' becomes the criterion of power. Power is thus seen as a type of social behaviour that can be directly observed and unambiguously identified. (Frequently, of course, acts of power may have to be retrospectively reconstructed: the observer, at least where institutionalized power relations between groups are involved, is rarely right at the elbow of the decision-maker.)

Those who prefer to equate power with its exercise in a social relationship fear the subjectivity that appears to be implicit in the view that actors may 'have' power without exercising it so long as belief in the probability of their exercising it limits the choices of others. As I have already indicated, treating power as a capacity runs the initial risk of seeing it as vested too exclusively in the power holder 'from where it

radiates to others'.²¹ But once we correct this possible over-emphasis by insisting that power is always a relation between two actors, do we not then risk going to the opposite extreme of making it dependent entirely on what is in the mind of the power subject? Are we not in effect saying that someone's belief that someone else has power actually confers power on the latter?²² Advocates of the so-called decisional method of studying community power structures have levelled this accusation of researchers who have used the reputational method.²³ Defenders of the reputational method have replied that the attribution of power to someone may indeed confer it on him. However, if this were always the case, popular beliefs about the distribution of power would never be false. Since it is doubtful that the users of the reputational method would themselves make so extreme a claim, it is obviously necessary to study the actual exercise of power to confirm or disprove the reputations for power revealed by opinion surveys. Supporters of the decisional method, however, have often recoiled so vigorously from the suggestion that reputation for power is equivalent to having power that they have fallen back on narrowly behaviouristic definitions equating power with its observable exercise.

Yet to avoid such a suggestion, one need only repeat the line of reasoning followed in correcting the opposite inference that power is a kind of force emanating from the power holder: if an actor is believed to be powerful, if he knows that others hold such a belief, and if he encourages it and resolves to make use of it by intervening in or punishing actions by others who do not comply with his wishes, then he truly has power and his power has indeed been conferred upon him by the attributions, perhaps initially without foundation, of others. But if he is unaware that others believe him powerful, or if he does not take their belief seriously in planning his own projects, then he has no power and the belief that he has is mistaken, a misperception of reality. We would not say that the residents of a street had power over a man with paranoid delusions who refused to leave his house because he feared attack by his neighbours. Nor would we say that the American Communist Party actually has great power because a certain segment of the public, influenced by right-wing ideologists, believes this to be the case and acts accordingly.

Raymond Aron has pointed out that the English and German languages employ the same terms, power and *Macht*, respectively, to refer both to the capacity to do something and to the actual exercise of the capacity.²⁴ In French, however, there are two distinct

words: *puissance*, indicating potential or capacity, and *pouvoir*, indicating the act. While the prevailing usage of both terms, according to Aron, has tended to blur this distinction between them and to create new, less meaningful distinctions, Aron argues that *puissance* should be regarded as the more general concept of which *pouvoir* is a particular form. Unfortunately, this terminological distinction does not exist in English, but the idea of 'potential' should be regarded as implicit in all non-behaviouristic definitions that treat power as in some sense a capacity distinguishable from its overt exercise.

Asymmetry and Balance in Power Relations

Power relations are asymmetrical in that the power holder exercises greater control over the behaviour of the power subject than the reverse, but reciprocity of influence – the defining criterion of the social relation itself – is never entirely destroyed except in those forms of physical violence which, although directed against a human being, treat him as no more than a physical object.²⁴

The asymmetry of power relations, however, is often stressed to a degree that would make it logically contradictory to speak of 'bilateral' power relations or of 'equality of power' in bargaining or conflict. Thus Gerth and Mills write: 'When everyone is equal there is no politics, for politics involves subordinates and superiors.'²⁶ And Peter Blau maintains that 'interdependence and mutual influence of equal strength indicate lack of power'.²⁷ Such assertions risk going too far in severing power relations from their roots in social interaction in its generic form, for the asymmetry of power relations is at least immanent in the give and take of dyadic interaction between equals, in which the control of one actor over the other's behaviour is reciprocated by a responsive act of control by the other. Asymmetry exists in each individual act-response sequence, but the actors continually alternate the roles of power holder and power subject in the course of their interaction. In a stable social relation (where there is recurrent interaction between the parties rather than interaction confined to a single occasion) a pattern may emerge in which one actor controls the other with respect to particular situations and spheres of conduct – or 'scopes', as they have often been called – while the other actor is regularly dominant in other areas of activity. Thus a wife may rule in the kitchen, while her husband controls the disposition of the family income. Or a labour union, as in

the unions of seamen and longshoremen, controls hiring, while the employer dictates the time and place of work.

Thus if we treat power relations as exclusively hierarchical and unilateral, we overlook an entire class of relations between persons or groups in which the control of one person or group over the other with reference to a particular scope is balanced by the control of the other in a different scope. The division of scopes between the parties is often the result of a bargaining process which may or may not have followed an open struggle for power – a separation in a marriage, a strike against an employer, a lawsuit in commercial rivalry, a war between nations.

The term 'intercursive power' has been suggested for relations characterized by a balance of power and a division of scopes between the parties.²⁸ It is contrasted with 'integral power', in which decision-making and initiatives to action are centralized and monopolized by one party. Intercursive power exists where the power of each party in a relationship is countervailed by that of the other, with procedures for bargaining or joint decision-making governing their relations when matters affecting the goals and interests of both are involved. Riesman's notion of a balance of veto groups, each able to prevent the others from acts threatening its interests, constitutes a negative system of intercursive power relations.²⁹ The various conceptions of 'pluralism' in contemporary sociology and political science are models of systems of intercursive power relations.

Integral power always raises the question *quis custodiet ipsos custodies?* – or who rules the rulers, guards the guardians, oversees the overseers? The assumption behind the query is that the rulers' power to decide at their own discretion cannot be entirely eliminated in human societies. 'Power cannot be dissolved into law,' as Franz Neumann observed,³⁰ and the liberal slogan, 'a government of laws, not of men', is, if taken literally, mere ideology expressing a mistrust of political power. Thus where integral power is established and recognized as unavoidable in at least some situations (or scopes), as in the case of the power of the state in modern times, attempts to limit it take a form other than that of transforming integral power into an intercursive power system. Integral power may be restricted without either reducing the decision-making autonomy of the power holder or countervailing it by giving others power over him with reference to particular scopes. Measures designed to limit integral power include periodic reviews of the acts of the power holder (legislative and judicial review), periodic

reaffirmations of his power-holding status or his removal and replacement (rules of tenure and succession), the setting of limits to the scopes he can control or to the range of options available to him within each scope ('civil liberties'), and rights of appeal and petition concerning grievances.

If such measures are to be truly effective and not just window dressing, like the impressive constitutions created by so many absolute dictatorships in recent history, there must be sources of power independent of the integral power holder that can be mobilized to enforce them. The law must be a web that catches the lawmaker as well as his subjects. Conditions making this a reality may include the separation of executive, legislative and judicial powers within the government, the creation of different and independent levels of government as in federative states, divided rather than unified elites within society at large, and, ultimately, strong support for constitutional guarantees or traditional 'unwritten' rights and liberties on the part of the power subjects. In other words, there must be real countervailing power centres able to enforce limits on the power of the integral power holder, and, insofar as this is required, the distinction between interscursive and integral power is not an absolute one. The checks on integral power, however, are largely negative. To quote Neumann again: 'All traditional legal conceptions are negative ones. They limit activities but do not shape them. It is this very character of law which grants to the citizen a minimum of protection.'³¹

There are four broad ways in which power subjects may attempt to combat or resist the power of an integral power holder: (1) they may strive to exercise countervailing power over him in order to transform his integral power into a system of interscursive power; (2) they may set limits to the extensiveness (the number of power subjects), comprehensiveness (the number of scopes), and intensity (the range of options within particular scopes) of his power; (3) they may destroy his integral power altogether, leaving the acts he formerly controlled open to free and self-determined choice; (4) they may seek to supplant him by acquiring and exercising his integral power themselves.

With reference to the integral power of modern states within their territorial jurisdictions, the first three choices correspond roughly to, respectively, efforts to establish democratic government, efforts to establish constitutional government, and the elimination of all government, or anarchy. The first two, of course, have frequently been combined as a political objective. The fourth way obviously

corresponds to the different forms of political succession, such as putsch, revolution, or the legally regulated competition of electoral contests.

Such devices as the initiative, the referendum and impeachment by ballot, as well as the conception of elections as popular mandates, are established ways in which subjects exercise countervailing power over their rulers. The transformation of integral power into interscursive power, however, can never be complete in the case of modern states, in so far as there is an irreducibly integral element in political power that cannot be eliminated altogether.³² Bills of rights, constitutional guarantees, jurisdictional restrictions, and statutory limits on the options available to the political decision-maker are ways of checking the integral power of the state without eliminating it altogether by depriving the ruler of any scopes in which he can decide and act according to his own discretion. The removal of certain substantive areas of choice by power subjects from any control by the state – such as the 'basic' freedoms of speech, religion, assembly, residence, etc. – has the effect of eliminating the integral power of the state in these areas, though the total elimination of state power – the third choice above – has never been permanently realized in any civilized society. (It has, of course, been the goal of anarchism as a political movement.)

It is misleading therefore to contend that 'all politics is a struggle for power'. The subjects or victims of power may seek to replace the power holder because they envy him and wish to use his power in the service of their own goals and interests, or because they are vengeful and wish to punish him as he may have punished them. But alternatively they may wish to free themselves from his control over them by limiting or abolishing his power and enlarging their own range of free choice. Politics includes both a struggle *for* power and a struggle to limit, resist and escape *from* power.

The Nature of the Effects Produced by Power

This issue does not strike me as an especially thorny one, so I shall discuss it very briefly. If A produces no change in B's actual behaviour but only a change in his feelings, attitudes, or beliefs, are we justified in imputing power to A?³³ The answer is implicit in the definition of power as the capacity of some person or persons to produce intended effects on other persons. If A's intention is to affect or alter B's attitudes rather than his behaviour and he succeeds in doing so in the desired direction,

then he clearly has power over B to this extent in the relevant scope to which the attitudes refer. If, however, his intention is to produce a particular act by B and he fails to do so, his attempt to exercise power eliciting only an inner disposition on the part of B to comply that is not acted on, or a feeling of guilt, then he has not exercised power over B but rather unintended influence. The same would be true if he evoked B's bitter hostility and strong determination to resist compliance. Surely, in this latter case we would not wish to impute power to A at all but rather to speak of the failure of his effort to control B, though he may indeed have influenced B by arousing his antagonism. In many actual situations, A is likely to aim at influencing both B's sentiments and his behaviour. If he succeeds only in the former, then he has exercised power that is limited in comprehensiveness and intensity while failing in his more ambitious effort to control B's behaviour. But there are many situations where the aim of the power holder is no more than to maintain or strengthen an existing attitude or belief system of the power subject, an attitude or belief system, for example, that sustains inaction or 'non-decisions' in Bachrach and Baratz's sense.³⁴ One thinks of propaganda to reinforce uncritical loyalty to a political regime, or to rekindle the fires of hostility toward foreign enemies or domestic dissenters. Clearly, the controllers of the mass media often aim at this sort of power, whether they are an arm of the government or represent 'private' organizations engaged in 'public relations' or 'institutional advertising'.

Three Attributes of Power Relations

Bertrand de Jouvenel has distinguished three variable attributes of all power relations, which, when specified, greatly facilitate the comparison of different types of power relations and structures. 'Power or authority,' as de Jouvenel states,

has three dimensions: it is *extensive* if the complying Bs [the power subjects] are many; it is *comprehensive* if the variety of actions to which A [the power holder] can move the Bs is considerable; finally it is *intensive* if the bidding of A can be pushed far without loss of compliance.³⁵

The *extensiveness* of a power relation may be narrow or broad. The former is illustrated by an isolated dyadic relation in which a single person exercises power over a single other, the latter by political regimes

in which one man rules over millions of subjects. De Jouvenel mentions only the number of subjects, but the power holder may of course also be plural – there may be many As as well as many Bs. The Aristotelian classification of forms of government is primarily based on whether sovereignty is 'in the hands of one, or the few, or of the many'.³⁶ Under kingship and tyranny, one man rules over many; under aristocracy and oligarchy, a few men rule over the many; and under polity and democracy, the majority of the community rule themselves. The direct democracy of the Athenian polis can be regarded as a differentiated, asymmetrical power structure with regard to the imposition of majority decisions on minorities and non-citizens (slaves and women). Much of classical and modern political theory, as well as a large literature in the fields of public administration and organization theory on the 'span of control', deals with the extensiveness of power relations. One might define extensiveness as the ratio of the number of persons who hold power to the number of the powerless. The major (and perhaps the only?) significant contention of the Italian neo-Machiavellian or elitist school to political theory (Pareto, Mosca, Michels) was to insist that in large societies or associations a minority of men inevitably come to wield power over the majority, or 'the masses'.

A serious limitation in the writings of the neo-Machiavellians is their readiness to assume that power wielded by a minority is likely to be unlimited, ideologies and rituals implying the contrary notwithstanding, and the more so the smaller the minority.³⁷ They failed to give independent consideration to the *comprehensiveness* of power: the number of scopes in which the power holder(s) controls the activities of the power subject(s). Robert Dahl employs the term 'scope' to refer chiefly to different institutional activities or 'issue-areas', such as education, political nominations, urban planning, and the like.³⁸ As a political scientist, he is primarily concerned with governmental decision-making. For a more general analysis of power relations, one may conceive of scopes as the different areas of choice and activity of the power subject. The *comprehensiveness* of a power relation, therefore, refers to the number of scopes over which the power holder holds power, or to the proportion or range of the power subject's total conduct and life-activity that is subject to control. At one extreme there is the power of a parent over an infant or young child, which is very nearly total in its comprehensiveness, extending to virtually everything the child does. At the other extreme, there is the very limited and specific power of the incumbents of highly specialized 'situated roles',³⁹ such as

those of a taxi dispatcher or a high-school student appointed to traffic safety patrol.

A third generic attribute of power relations is the *intensity* of the relation. If I understand correctly de Jouvenel's brief discussion of this attribute, he has in mind the range of effective options open to the power holder *within* each and every scope of the power subject's conduct over which he wields power. What limits are there to the actions which the power holder can influence the power subject to perform? Will the power subject commit suicide or murder under the power holder's influence? What intended effects sought by the power holder will be resisted, producing, at least initially, a breakdown of the power relation? Justice Holmes once wrote:

I heard the original Agassiz (Louis) say that in some part of Germany there would be a revolution if you added a farthing to the cost of a glass of beer. If that was true, the current price was one of the rights of man at that place.⁴⁰

Or, in the language employed here, the intensity of the power of tavern-owners to set the price of a glass of beer was severely limited with the prevailing price setting the upper limit.

I have previously noted that formal statutory guarantees of 'the rights of man', or civil liberties, set limits both to the comprehensiveness and the intensity of power. In the former case, certain scopes are specifically excluded from the control of power holders, such as the freedoms of speech, assembly, religious worship, travel, and so on. Statutory limits on the intensity of power curtail the range of options available to the power holder within those scopes where he does have control. Thus the courts may possess the power to impose punishments on lawbreakers, but not 'cruel and unusual punishments'; a trade union certified as a collective bargaining agent may require a union shop, but not, under the Taft-Hartley Act, a closed shop. These examples refer to formal legal limitations on the intensity of a power relation within a given scope, but obviously, as the remark of Justice Holmes reflecting his famous legal positivism suggests, *de facto* limits are likely to be present in even the most informal, interpersonal power relations. At the pole of maximum intensity one might locate the relationship between a lover and a loved one where the former declares 'your wish is my command' – and means it. At the opposite pole stands the 'decision-maker' whose choices are confined to a very narrow range: a tax assessor, for example, who by statute can raise or lower tax rates by no

more than a few percentage points. The tendency in some social science writing to identify 'decision-making' with the exercise of power can be misleading if the intensity of the decision-maker's power to decide is not taken into account.

Herbert Simon's useful term 'zone of acceptance' can be understood as referring to the intensity of power.⁴¹ P. H. Partridge, however, has adopted Simon's term to describe what I have called 'comprehensiveness' as a general attribute of power and also used it synonymously with the particular scopes, or areas of activity, that, taken together if there is more than one, constitute the comprehensiveness of a power relation. He writes:

If I try to influence the views my students have about Marx, I may succeed; if I try to influence, still more to prescribe, their choice of wives, they will ignore me. Following Simon, we call this dimension the 'zone of acceptance' . . .⁴²

Partridge then defines 'intensity' much as I have:

. . . we find also that within the 'zone of acceptance', and with respect to *one* particular segment of a man's interests or activities, there is a limit to the extent that another can influence or control this segment . . . This dimension we call the 'intensity' of power . . .⁴³

These differences of terminology are scarcely important, although I think that Simon's term comes closer to describing the intensity rather than the comprehensiveness of power. If a power holder tries to extend his power beyond a particular scope (or zone of acceptance in Partridge's sense) in which it is seen as legitimate, as in Partridge's example of a teacher trying to influence his students' choice of wives, he will arouse resistance. One may conclude that his power is limited to a specific scope, such as to the right to decide what will be covered in a lecture course, what reading will be required, what grades assigned on examinations, and a few details of classroom behaviour. But if a teacher assigns five times as much reading as is customary, fails every student registered in the course, or spends the entire lecture period gazing silently out of the window, his authority is also likely to be challenged. The first example of exceeding the 'limit within which authority will be accepted' (in Simon's phrase) reveals the comprehensiveness of the power relation; the second example indicates its intensity.

At a certain level of generality the distinction between com-

prehensiveness and intensity is of little significance because both attributes or dimensions of power relations represent limits to the range of effects that the power holder can produce on the power subject's actions. I prefer to use 'scope' to refer to the segment or sphere of conduct controlled by the power holder and 'zone of acceptance' to indicate the range of compliant acts by the power subject within particular scopes that the power holder is capable of producing. Although there are empirical instances of power relations that are high in comprehensiveness and low in intensity (which may itself vary within the different scopes covered by a power relation) and *vice-versa*, there are also power relations in which the two attributes vary together in the same direction. 'Total' or 'absolute' power usually means power that is high in both comprehensiveness and intensity. On the other hand, limited scope-specific power relations are usually also low in intensity.

What interrelationships are there among these three attributes of power relations? The most total and unlimited power, power that is greatest in comprehensiveness and intensity, is likely to be least extensive: namely, dyadic relations in which one person has power over a single other. As far back as Aristotle, the power of a master over a household slave has often served as the standard example of virtually unrestricted power. The power of a parent over a small child – the *fons et origo* of the human character structure – is another obvious example. The power of the loved one over the lover in a passionate, 'romantic' love relationship represents the most narrowly extensive and highly individualized form of power relation, since the relation is based entirely on the uniqueness of the particular individuals involved. As Philip Slater has argued, an exclusive love relationship constitutes what he calls a 'dyadic withdrawal' from society and its obligations, in its most extreme form the *Liebestod*, and has been subjected by all societies to normative controls.⁴⁴ A love relationship, however, is often a relatively balanced, or bilateral power relation between two individuals. A relationship between a sadist and a masochist best exemplifies a narrowly extensive but highly comprehensive and intensive interpersonal power relation.

A patriarch in the family, a tribal leader or a village despot may also wield highly comprehensive and intensive power over a relatively small number of subjects. The limited extensiveness of his power enables him to dispense with intermediaries to whom power is delegated and who as subordinate power holders may become potential rivals and competitors. Where the power subjects are few in number, less power has to be delegated from the top, and levels of power in a pyramidal or

scalar power structure are less likely to emerge. This is a special case of the well-known generalization of organization theory that the larger the group and the more differentiated the activities of its members the greater the number of supervisory levels required if it is successfully to achieve its goals.

The term 'totalitarianism' has come into use to describe tyrannical or oligarchical (in the Aristotelian sense) political regimes that wield more extensive, comprehensive and intensive power than any of the monarchies, tyrannies or oligarchies of the past. Totalitarian regimes exercise more extensive power in that they have flourished in large and populous nation-states rather than in small city-states or agrarian communities. Some writers indeed have argued that full totalitarian rule is possible *only* in large and populous societies.⁴⁵ Modern technology, especially new media of communications, permits more highly centralized bureaucratic control over the lives of the subjects, thus concentrating decision-making in few hands even though the power structure includes more intermediate levels between top and bottom. Yet the power of a totalitarian dictator over his subjects is scarcely as comprehensive as that of a parent over a child or a master over a slave. The difficulty of maintaining the *visibility* at all times of the behaviour of all the subjects sets limits to the comprehensiveness of totalitarian power. A Nazi once boasted that 'the only free man in Germany is a man who is asleep', but even in Nazi Germany at the time this was a considerable exaggeration. Negative utopian visions, such as those of Orwell and Zamiatin which describe societies even more totally controlled by small elites than the historical examples of totalitarianism in the present century, depend to a considerable extent on science-fiction solutions to the visibility problem, Orwell's two-way television screens being the best-known example.

In her great book, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt regards the concentration camp as the ultimate and most significant expression of totalitarian rule. She calls the Nazi camps 'experiments in total domination'. But the camps were, of course, smaller communities than the wider totalitarian society in which they existed; so the total power their rulers exercised over the inmates does not invalidate the general rule that the comprehensiveness and intensity of power tend to vary inversely with its extensiveness.

New media of communication, techniques of observation and persuasion, and instruments of violence have also, it has often been argued, increased the intensity of power in totalitarian states.

Propaganda over centrally controlled mass media and psychological methods of 'thought reform' have allegedly enabled totalitarian power holders to indoctrinate their subjects more thoroughly with passionate and unconditional loyalties to the regime. At the same time deviance and noncompliance, let alone active resistance, have become more difficult with the use of new techniques of surveillance and extracting information, and new means of coercion. Even in the democracies, enormous anxieties have been aroused in recent years by electronic 'bugging' and wiretapping devices, subliminal advertising, and so-called 'brainwashing'. Events in Eastern Europe since 1945, and even in the Soviet Union and China, have somewhat reduced the plausibility of the assumption that control of the new technology has made totalitarian regimes virtually invulnerable to internal dissent and opposition. Political will and organization and the legitimacy of the regime in the eyes of its subjects remain, as in the past, crucial factors determining the efficacy of opposition, and these factors are by no means entirely subject to control by the ruling elite. Even though the new technology permits more centralized control and speedier response to incipient threats, it also requires the disciplined and dedicated cooperation of a larger number of men trained to wield its complex instruments, and this dilutes the total power of the ruling élite.

In summary, there are three main reasons why the greater extensiveness of a power relation sets limits to its comprehensiveness and intensity. First, the greater the number of power subjects, the greater the difficulty of supervising all of their activities. Second, the greater the number of power subjects, the more extended and differentiated the chain of command necessary to control them, creating new subordinate centres of power that can be played off against each other and that may themselves become foci of opposition to the integral power holder. Third, the greater the number of subjects, the greater the likelihood of wide variation in their attitudes toward the power-holder. The power-holder will not be able to wield power with equal comprehensiveness and intensity over all of his subjects. A few may be eager and pliant servants of his will, others will 'go along' less enthusiastically, still others will require constant supervision and threats to keep their performances in line, and there will be some against whom force must be used even to the extent of eliminating them from the ranks of the living.

CHAPTER TWO

The Forms of Power: Force, Manipulation, Persuasion

Many writers have defined power as the capacity to impose, or to threaten successfully to impose, penalties or deprivations for non-compliance. Perhaps the most influential definition of this kind is Max Weber's:

In general, we understand by 'power' the chance of a man or a number of men to realize their own will in a social action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action.¹

The reference here to resistance clearly suggests a view of power as the capacity to impose penalties, or to coerce, and it has usually been so understood. Robert Bierstedt, recognizing the dispositional rather than the episodic nature of power, writes: 'Power is the ability to employ force, not its actual employment, the ability to apply sanctions, not their actual application.'² Similarly, Lasswell and Kaplan write:

Power is a special case of the exercise of influence: it is the process of affecting policies of others with the help of (actual or threatened) severe deprivations for nonconformity with the policies intended.³

To define power, as I have, as the capacity to produce intended and foreseen effects on others avoids this equation of power with the ability to impose sanctions. The latter is certainly an important form of power, but I see no good reason for excluding from an initial definition situations in which someone, whether willingly or even unknowingly, complies with someone else's intention, whether or not the latter is able, or is believed by the former to be able, to impose sanctions. As J. A. A. Van Doorn has observed, this 'would not seem to be essential, since

power is perfectly conceivable without any opposition on the part of the subject – notably when its exercise is accepted'.⁴ Few writers on power hold as consistently to, or develop as fully the logical implications of their own definitions as Bierstedt, who explicitly denies that persuasion and authority based on belief in competence (e.g. the authority of the physician over the patient) are forms of power at all rather than of influence.⁵ I find it more useful to regard these as distinct forms of power, conceiving of power more broadly than Bierstedt.

Among more recent writers, Bachrach and Baratz, in their valuable critique of studies of power which identify the powerful with those participating in actual decision-making, follow Lasswell and Kaplan in equating power with the capacity to compel obedience in the face of opposition. However, unlike the writers previously mentioned, they do not treat voluntary compliance as 'institutionalized power' but reject it altogether as a form of power. They are quite clear on this, arguing that if a sentry orders an approaching soldier to halt or be shot and 'the soldier put obedience to a sentry's order at the top of his schedule of values' in complying with it, then 'the threat of severe deprivations had no bearing on his behaviour. In such circumstances it cannot be said that the guard exercised power'.⁶

Presumably, they would not regard persuasion either as a form of power on the same grounds, although they do not say so directly. Not only do Bachrach and Baratz reject voluntary obedience, traditionally labelled 'authority', as a form of power, but they also reject force and manipulation on the grounds that neither allows the individual any choice between compliance and non-compliance and both are therefore 'non-rational and tend to be non-relational'. ('Non-volitional' would be a better term than 'non-rational'.) Bachrach and Baratz are entirely correct in this contention, but I nevertheless find it more useful and in closer conformity with both popular and most scholarly discourse to define power more parsimoniously and broadly as simply the capacity to produce intended effects, regardless of the physical or psychological factors on which the capacity rests, and then to proceed to differentiate *force*, *manipulation*, *persuasion*, and *authority* as distinct forms of power.

I have the impression that a somewhat larger number of writers have defined power in this more general manner than have identified it with constraint or the overcoming of resistance. Goldhamer and Shils, for example, write: 'A person may be said to have *power* to the extent that he influences the behaviour of others in accordance with his own

intentions.' Gerth and Mills initially adopt the Weberian definition in stating 'we ascribe "power" to those who can influence the conduct of others even against their will', but two pages later they explicitly exclude constraint as the defining criterion of power: '*power* is simply the probability that men will act as another man wishes. The action may rest upon fear, rational calculation of advantage, lack of energy to do otherwise, loyal devotion, indifference, or a dozen other individual motives.'⁹ Actually, Weber's discussion from which theirs derives places excessive weight on the word 'even': Weber writes of the actor's ability 'to carry out his own will even against resistance' and then adds 'regardless of the basis on which this probability rests'. The latter phrase suggests that there are multiple bases for the exercise of power going beyond the ability to coerce the subject by threatening him with deprivations. Weber goes on to observe: 'The concept of power is sociologically amorphous. All conceivable qualities of a person and all conceivable combinations of circumstances may put him in a position to impose his will in a given situation.'¹⁰ This points to the existence of multiple and diverse bases on which someone may exercise power over another, including prestige considerations, persuasion, manipulation, a sense of duty, habit, and erotic and personal magnetism, as well as fear of physical or economic sanctions.

In common with many sociologists, Gerth and Mills define *authority* as 'legitimate power' involving the voluntary obedience of the subject based on the belief that obedience is his duty.¹¹ While I shall define authority somewhat differently in the next chapter, I accept authority as a special case of power, which remains the more general concept. I accept also Lasswell and Kaplan's view that power is a special case of influence, namely, intended as opposed to unintended influence as I have already argued.

The chart on page 24 shows the forms of influence and power and the relations among them. Power is intended and effective influence and there are four distinct forms of power, one of them, *authority*, itself divided into five subtypes.

Force, *manipulation* and *persuasion* are classified here as forms of power, but all three lack certain of the generic characteristics of power discussed in the previous chapter. Force and some forms of manipulation are not social relations at all involving reciprocal if asymmetrical interaction between self-conscious subjects, as I have already noted in connection with Bachrach and Baratz. Nor does the rule of anticipated reactions, so important a feature of the latent or