
CONCEPTUALIZING POWER

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In the literature on collective action and, more generally, the study of politics, political power is frequently of central concern. Yet debates over the meaning of power are legion, and so inconclusive that at least two major social scientists have advocated abandoning the concept altogether. [Riker 1964 and March 1966] In this paper I will consider some recent approaches to the study of power, including that of Charles Tilly, and discuss the extent to which they avoid some of the major pitfalls of previous studies.

One of the most persistent difficulties in discussing power (and influence, which I will here use synonymously, although I am aware of different usages) has been the simultaneous usage of the term, sometimes in the same paragraph, to designate what Herbert Simon calls "value position" and "value potential" as well as the act of influencing itself. That is, "power" sometimes is equated with "resources" (such as money or political office) and sometimes with "ability" or "capacity" to accomplish one's will, while at other times it means (e.g., "exercising power" or "influencing") the process of accomplishing, producing, changing, or affecting someone or something.¹ Part of the blame here belongs to the inconveniences of the English language, which uncooperatively failed to provide a verb for power. "Influence" does exist as both noun and verb, but many people wish to distinguish shades of meaning more precisely, and do not use power and influence as synonymous terms.

¹There is a nice discussion of this problem in Herbert A. Simon's subtle and interesting article, "Notes on the Observation and Measurement of Political Power," in Models of Man, pp. 62-78.

The trouble with using the same term to refer to value position, value potential, and process of influencing is that it leads to muddled arguments, frequently circular in nature. In discussing the difficulties of operationalizing the concept of power, Robert Dahl has pointed out that the validity of operationalizing power as resources (value position) rests on inference as to what gives people the opportunity to influence decisions. Thus, frequently we assume what we are trying to prove. Some of the earlier versions of the "power elite" argument, for example, exhibit this difficulty. [See Dahl 1957]

In From Mobilization to Revolution Charles Tilly nicely avoids the intellectual confusions that result from the ambiguities of our common language. For "value position" he uses resources. In general he equates resources with the assets helpful to groups in influencing other groups and governments. While the characteristics and possessions so designated are presumed to be relevant to power, it is not assumed that they constitute it, or that they are measures of power, or that they must be the same in every situation. In this regard, it must be stressed that, while net increases in resources are measured by the conception of power Tilly proposes, these increased resources themselves are not power. If they were, we would be back to the same circular argument in more complex form that has already bedeviled such discussions. Power here is not an increase or decrease in things possessed; it denotes a more complex notion of the profitability of group action, the ratio of return to investment. The definitions of power as capacity or ability are themselves rather ambiguous, but Tilly's notion of mobilization captures the most significant ideas embodied here rather well, since it

describes both collective control over resources and readiness to act on interests. Hence it probably comes as close to grasping the notion of "value potential" as is feasible. Tilly defines mobilization as "the extent of resources under the collective control of the group; as a process, an increase in the resources or in the degree of collective control" He defines power as "the extent to which the outcomes of the population's interactions with other populations favor its interests over those of the others; acquisition of power is an increase in the favorability of such outcomes, loss of power a decline in their favorability; political power refers to the outcomes of interaction with governments." In diagram form (see, for example, Figure 4-13) a contender's power position is represented by the line showing the curve of probable returns. (Within that diagram Tilly is able to delineate both "power efficiency" and "power effectiveness.") Thus Tilly's conceptualization has the advantages of avoiding circularity in use of the term power, providing distinct terms for value position and value potential, and visualizing power in an economic model that provides an interesting new way of operationalizing the concept.

Power as "Social Causation"

Apart from ambiguities of definition, however, there is a far more serious conceptual problem in dealing with power which has roots in epistemology. This problem is the association of power with causation. Chiefly due to the work of Robert Dahl, political scientists have come explicitly to recognize that power is a causal notion, that power is in some sense "social causation." However, we would not alleviate our

problem here by outlawing the reading of Dahl, for implicit in most debates about power are controversies about causality. Dahl simply did everyone a favor by putting the cards on the table.² In the literature of American political science, the longest sustained controversy of the post-war period has been the "pluralist-power elite" debate, now evolved into the "agenda-setting" debate. The volumes of literature produced on this general topic have surely set a new record in the annals of talking-past-one-another. If we leave aside the surface frills and examine the central argument, we soon see that the essence of the debate has not lain in conflicting "empirical evidence" or in the merits of the "positional strategy" versus the "decision strategy" versus the "reputational strategy." Rather, the disputants are endlessly arguing about causality. Note, for example, the salience of "no action at a distance," "anticipated reactions," and grounds of inference in this literature.

Why is it so serious that power is treated as social causation? In a nutshell, because (a) for two hundred years philosophers have had such difficulties in handling the concept of cause that many philosophers and scientists try to avoid it altogether, and (b) therefore, when conceptions of power are entangled with the concept of causality, social scientists ostensibly explicating power are really wrangling about issues the gravity of which they frequently do not even perceive--issues which some of the greatest minds in the western world have been unable to resolve. Obviously, then, little progress can be expected--that is, theoretical work will probably not be cumulative--if power is conceived of as social causation. Of course, one encounters problems in other areas of social

²William Riker also wrote an important article [Riker 1964] on the association of power with causation (to be discussed below).

science that also result from debates over causality--i.e., what should we infer from correlations; why should we assume that, because black children in integrated schools "do better," according to national tests, we can improve black performance by busing children; etc.; the examples are legion--but the difference here is that the very concept of power which we are trying to define and operationalize is treated as synonymous with causality.

In an early paper Dahl recognized the difficulties created by this association and tried to sidestep the problem by an operational definition. He first provided an "intuitive" definition of power: "A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do." [Dahl 1957: 202-203] He followed this with a comment about the questions that "Hume and his successors" raised and a recognition that because of the "need to distinguish mere 'association' from 'cause'"

. . . the attempt to define power could push us into some messy epistemological problems that do not seem to have any generally accepted solutions at the moment. I shall therefore quite deliberately steer clear of the possible identity of "power" and "cause," and the host of problems this identity might give rise to. [Dahl 1957: 203]

He then stated that power is a relation among people, and went on to turn his statements about power relations into probability statements. Thus: "The power of an actor, A, would seem to be adequately defined by the measure M which is the difference in the probability of an event, given certain action by A, and the probability of an event given no such action by A." [Dahl 1957: 214]

In this article Dahl's chief concern is with the task of operationalizing the concept of power. As mentioned earlier, he recognized

the inadequacies of operational definitions based on resources; therefore he suggested as an alternative the use of probability statements. ("The amount of an actor's power can be represented by a probability statement: e.g., 'the chances are 9 out of 10 that if the President promises a judgeship to five key Senators, the Senate will not override his veto,' etc.")³

These operationalizations are simply statements of correlation. X will happen when Y happens in Z percentage of cases. Such a statement is to be accepted as equivalent to the concept of power as "getting someone to do something he would not otherwise do." But clearly they are not equivalent. As Dahl immediately admits, the validity of making such an equivalence hinges upon inference (just as in the case of using resources). To make a valid inference here about power, he contends, "three necessary conditions" must be present:

1. There must be a "time lag, however small, from the action of the actor who is said to exert power to the responses of the respondent. This requirement merely accords with one's intuitive belief that A can hardly be said to have power over a unless A's power attempts precede a's response."
2. [T]here is no "action at a distance." Unless there is some "connection" between A and a, then no power relation can be said to exist.

³Dahl is certainly not the only writer who has used correlational statements in this way. I have singled out this article, not for its uniqueness but because Dahl is far clearer about the problem he is tackling than most writers are. That is, I am not attacking a "straw man"--quite the contrary.

3. A's action must change the probability of a doing something. If a was as likely to read a book before A threatened him, we cannot say A had power over a.

Such "necessary conditions" do not simply "accord with one's intuitive beliefs" about evidence; on the contrary, for centuries the criteria of time, connection and change in results have been used as evidence of causal relationships. It is precisely the validity and adequacy of such types of evidence that is "up for grabs" in modern philosophy.⁴

Thus we begin with a causal concept of power, an "intuitive notion"; explicitly state that we will avoid this notion of causality; operationalize the concept of power as a probability statement or statement of correlation; search for evidence of correlation; and infer a causal relationship on the basis of conditions accompanying the correlated events. We have come full circle. We infer on the basis of what we have already rejected.

In his later work Dahl abandoned all diffidence about equating power with social causation. For example: "One meaning in political discourse of the statement that 'A has power over B with respect to X' is simply that A (under certain conditions) can cause B to act X (with a probability of P). To put the matter this way may render the notion of power rather peculiar as a central concept in political science: Does any other field of empirical investigation take cause itself, in this instance cause in interpersonal relations, as an object of study? Perhaps

⁴A convenient summary of the debate over causality is available in Ajdukiewicz 1973: 129-131.

nor." [Dahl 1965: 89] Rather than attempting to resolve the problem, Dahl (like many other social scientists) simply concluded that, despite the epistemological issues, the concept of cause was essential and therefore must be used (the social science equivalent of "Damn the torpedoes; full speed ahead!").

To make matters worse, as William Riker has shown, "at least two main types of notions of causality are used in social science discourse. One is a notion of marginality, the other is a notion of necessary and sufficient condition." [Riker 1964: 346] The first he refers to as "recipe-causality," drawing on a term coined by Douglas Gasking [1955]. This, it seems to me, may be equated with the notion of cause as "mechanical force" (see below). The second view redefines causality "so that it has the same logical form as the equivalence relation and sometimes furthermore so that the two clauses have a similar temporal and spatial reference." Here "cause" is usually equated with "necessary and sufficient condition." Riker's thesis is that "differences in the notion of cause stand back of these differences in the notion of power." He delineates five different conceptions of power in current literature, broadly groups them into "ego-oriented power" and "other-oriented power," and contends that "there is a direct parallelism (a) between ego-oriented power and necessary-and-sufficient-condition causality and (b) between other-oriented power and recipe causality. It is not surprising that this parallelism exists, for power and cause are closely related concepts. Power is potential cause. Or, power is the ability to exercise influence while cause is the actual exercise of it." [Riker 1964: 347]

Riker suggests that, given the ambiguities in the concept of power, "we ought to banish it," but, alternatively, that "each definition

specify clearly the kind of theory of cause it reflects." The five definitions of power he describes are those of Shapley and Shubik, James March, Robert Dahl, Dorwin Cartwright and Georg Karlsson.

In more recent literature certain alternative solutions to the problem of defining power have been suggested. While there is not room here (nor, for that matter, sufficient knowledge in this corner) for a full-fledged survey, an indication of three diverse alternatives may be helpful as a background to discussion of Tilly's proposal.

The Description of Power in Intentional Explanations

Because of the difficulties of "power as cause," some have suggested scrapping the whole covering law framework of explanation in treating power and turning instead to an intentional form of explanation (sometimes called a teleological explanation, although this term may be misleading because of the association with Aristotelian philosophy). An intentional form of explanation is suited only to the study of human action, and attempts to explain human behavior in terms of reasons, which may be goals, purposes, maxims, or moral rules. By contrast, a covering law type of explanation is not limited to analysis of human action and attempts to explain and/or predict why and when something can be expected to happen by reference to observed past regularities, in sequence of events, associated conditions, etc. (This is sometimes called "causal explanation," a misleading term which leads also to some confusion.) This is, of course, the pattern of explanation used in

natural science. By and large, it has been adopted by social scientists as well, particularly by those committed to the application of the scientific method to the study of social phenomena.

By contrast, due to the peculiar characteristics of social phenomena, many of those favoring an intentional approach contend that the social sciences require a special form of explanation, and some reject the very notion of the "scientific" study of society. A recent example of an intentional approach is provided by Terence Ball, who argues that "power explanations cannot be 'causal' in the sense required by covering-law theory, inasmuch as there are no genuine laws available to warrant them." [Ball 1975: 206] According to Ball, "the covering law model of explanation requires that causal explanations be warranted by universal laws." His authority here is Hempel. Ball contends:

All power attributions are conditional ascriptions of some ability or capacity to do certain kinds of things, perform certain kinds of actions, or whatever. So we say that the acid can dissolve the substance and that the prime minister can dissolve the Parliament: and both of these are power attributions. But the difference lies in what is, or can be, entailed by a full statement of the relevant conditions. In the case of the acid, the can entails will, supposing the relevant conditions to obtain. Not so for the prime minister: to say that he can dissolve Parliament under certain conditions is not to say that he will dissolve it whenever those conditions obtain. In the case of human agents, the explanatory can need not entail the predictive will. Therefore power explanations do not conform to the "symmetry thesis" of covering-law theory, which holds that explanations and predictions are logically identical and interchangeable. [Ball 1975: 214]

Ball's argument that political power should be analyzed in the framework of intentional explanation is based, then, in part on the idea that power relationships do not conform to the format required of covering law theory. However, he goes beyond this to argue that "power-relations

between human beings are intentional: there can be no unintentional or 'unconscious' exercise of power; the idea of exercising power has an element of intention 'built into' it." [Ball 1975: 202] He suggests that social phenomena defined as power relationships are more accurately described in terms of reason-governed, rather than universal-law explanations. Two examples he cites are Dahl's example of a policeman directing traffic and the Miller-Stokes "causal model of constituency influence in Congress." Ball concludes that the observable regularity seen in the two examples "is an artifact of a rule(s); for it provides evidence that men know, have learned, and are correctly following the relevant rule(s)." By contrast, "the idea of learning a law of nature--as distinguished, of course, from learning of or about it--would be absurd. . . ." Hence these "power" relationships are better understood in rational or rule-referring than in Humean causal terms." [Ball 1975: 209]

Ball fails to convince on several grounds. For one, the covering law model he offers (that of Hempel) is unnecessarily rigid. Ball is very misleading in suggesting that either we must adopt Hempel's view of universal law or else we must accept an intentional form of explanation. He creates a false dilemma, because the options are not necessarily so limited. Twentieth-century covering law models even in the physical sciences may take the form of probability statements. As physical science illustrates, the issue of mechanical force causation is separable from the covering law issue.⁵ The physicists, presumably, have succeeded

⁵The extent to which conceptions of political power are dependent on Galilean or Newtonian notions of mechanical force as basic metaphors is not always appreciated. Both Ball 1975 and McFarland 1969 discuss this. Note McFarland [p. 11]: "The idea of force essentially refers to a cause that pushes; definitions of power based on force differentials refer to what happens when a first causal agent

in freeing themselves from the spell of Newtonian or Galilean metaphors, yet manage to retain a covering law form of explanation.

In arguing that "if political power is indeed a causal concept, then there must be general laws available for warranting power-explanations," Ball is blurring two conceptual issues together into one.

This is illustrated in his handling of the two examples. He is quite right in showing that both situations can be handled by "rule-referring reason explanations," but it does not follow that covering law explanations are therefore inappropriate. It is unnecessarily restrictive to insist that choice of perspective must depend on the nature of the rule or law that produces the regularity in the motorists' or congressmen's behavior. One could, for example, simply regard traffic laws and voting rights as resources and hypothesize that those who control such resources have a higher probability of being obeyed than those who do not. Of course, when we do this we leave ourselves open to the inference problem mentioned earlier. However, it should be noted, this is not the same inference problem Ball refers to when he says of the Miller-Stokes "causal model" that the laws needed to license such inference are nowhere available. Even a "law of nature," which he sees as appropriate to covering law explanation, would not help us infer causation.

pushes one way (force) and a second causal agent pushes another way (resistance) Incentives and utilities are inward subjective causes that push and pull; in other words, they are subjectively experienced forces. Hence, definitions of power or influence that refer to C's manipulation of R's utility function or incentive system merely add a set of intermediary variables to the idea of power as causation: C causes a change in R's utilities or incentives (the intermediary variables), which, in turn, cause a change in R's behavior. Definitions of power that emphasize the last added member of a minimal winning coalition essentially refer to the idea of necessary and sufficient cause. . . . The last to join provides the final amount of needed force or causal push." (Note here that McFarland finds a common denominator in these notions of power as causation where Riker distinguishes two notions of causality.)

To me it would seem that there is nothing about the broad subject matter of power relationships that intrinsically makes only one form of explanation appropriate to the concept of power. At issue is not the topic of research but the specific purposes of the researcher and the type of evidence available. Sometimes an intentional explanation will produce far richer results; at other times it simply may not be workable. However, it is important not to make Ball's mistake of equating covering-law forms of explanation with specifically causal ones that in fact rely on outdated physical metaphors.

Power as "Cause" or Power as "Effect"?

Geoffrey Debnam suggests another line of attack on the "power problem." In a recent article (contributed as yet another chapter in that weary saga, the community power debate), he noted that "power" has been used to describe both cause and effect and that "if we continue using the same word to describe both we confound understanding by obscuring what is to be explained." [Debnam 1974: 898] Here Debnam points to yet another sense in which the term "cause" is sometimes used. He is simply making the distinction between "input" and "outcome" variables. The problem is that power is used as both an "input" and an "outcome" term, which obviously cannot work. While the relationship between Debnam's point and that of Simon in the article cited earlier is evident, Debnam's solution is a bit different. Debnam suggests that we shift our attention to the "effect" rather than the "cause," and suggests that if we narrow this to "intended effects" we will have a more verifiable concept.

Certainly he is not alone in restricting power to intentional action. Bertrand Russell's definition of power as "the production of intended effects" has had popularity both among theorists using intentional forms of explanation and those (such as William Camson) concerned with causal models of power (both in the covering law explanation and in the specifically mechanical-force sense of the term). According to Debaam, "A definition of 'intentions' and 'effects' poses no more problems than does a definition of 'issue' or 'decision.' In both cases the problem of establishing a requisite level of significance arises, but can be dealt with only by the observer using stated criteria within the context of a specific study." [p. 899] I would say in reply that defining "intention" is more like defining "rationality," and that variable levels of significance in variable contexts probably means no concept. Bringing "intentions" in to analysis of power is rather like letting the camel's nose into the tent.

In an article on "Power and Intention" D. M. White raised a number of significant questions about the concept of intention. [White 1971] It is not possible to provide an adequate summary of the issues here. Basically, however, White argues that, once "intentions" are introduced, we either rely on an excessively ratiocinative model of political behavior, or we find that we have admitted the broad problem of "states of mind" into our tent. The concept of power emerges, according to White, as "even more intractable than it has been seen to be." [White 1971: 749] In any case, it is difficult to believe that intention makes power a more verifiable concept than it previously seemed to be.⁶

⁶Ball refers to White's article in a footnote, however in that particular context it sounds as though he views White as providing evidence for his own thesis that power has an intentionality requirement. On the contrary, White seems quite ambivalent and shows how difficult the topic of intention is and how it complicates the analysis of power.

Power as "Causation of Outcomes by Preferences"

An important and stimulating recent effort to deal with the problem of conceptualizing power is provided by Jack Nagel in his book The Descriptive Analysis of Power. Nagel stresses the adjective "descriptive" in the title of that book, stating that "explanatory" or "predictive" analyses must await far more complex theories. Discussions of power based largely on outcome, or effect measures, can only be descriptive. (See especially the concluding chapter on this point.) Nagel defines power basically as "causation of outcomes by preferences." [Nagel 1975: 144] More elaborately, "A power relation, actual or potential, is an actual or potential causal relation between the preferences of an actor regarding an outcome and the outcome itself." [Nagel 1975: 29] Nagel's work must be seen as an interesting synthesis of the ideas of Simon, Dahl, and preference theory, undertaken in part as response to the agenda-setting debate (subset of the community power debate) set off by Bachrach and Baratz years ago.

The key figure here is Simon. Among social scientists, the most important attempt to salvage causality on a serious basis was made by Herbert Simon in a series of brilliant papers. (For a simple summary, see Simon 1968. Nagel also supplies a very helpful summary in Chapter 4 of his book.) Simon developed a conception of causality as a dependency relation, a kind of asymmetrical correlation between variables. Simon utilized mathematical equations for this purpose. Since individual equations are symmetrical, Simon recognized that causality could be demonstrated--assuming it was, as commonly assumed, an asymmetrical relation--only through a structure of equations organized so that the

solution of succeeding equations must be dependent on others, ultimately culminating in an equation whose solution is self-contained. In line with Hume, and quite appropriately for a concept based on mathematics, Simon asserts that "causal orderings are simply properties of the scientist's model." [Simon 1957: 11] That is, as Nagel rephrases it, "causation is a relation between elements in a theory, not between objects or events in the real world. A conception so premised avoids objectionable metaphysical implications." [Nagel 1975: 36] While this idea nicely addresses part of Hume's inconvenient argument, it has the disadvantage within Simon's work (it seems to me) of basic irrelevance to his work on power. When he turns to addressing power (as in "Notes on the Observation and Measurement of Political Power"), the analysis results in rather ordinary statements to the effect that "we wish to observe how a change in the behavior of one (the influencer) alters the behavior of the other (the influencee)." [Simon 1957: 77-78]

Nagel recognizes that Simon's work on power does not measure up to the potential of the work on causality. He also points out that the mathematical results Simon arrived at could be achieved alternatively by path analysis, developed through the work of Sewall Wright, a geneticist concerned with far different problems. But he accepts Simon's basic idea of causality. At the same time he accepts Dahl's conception of power as a causal relation. However, he also recognizes the problem of "anticipated reactions," the problem of intentions that Ball, Debnam, and, among others, Bachrach and Baratz have pointed out. In an earlier article responding to the agenda-setting literature, Nagel adopted a phenomenological approach. But in the later book Nagel acknowledges the

difficulties of determining intentions [Nagel 1975: 20-22] and opts instead for preference theory which he contends is more verifiable and at the same time will allow the social scientist to deal with the psychological problems that could not be handled by the conventional (Dahl) decision-making approach. Whether or not Nagel solves the major problems (which are extremely difficult), he at least deals with the central controversies that have surrounded the subject of power in the last twenty years. Among the (political science) studies I have seen, it seems to me that it is this work by Nagel that constitutes the major study by which other recent studies of power must be judged.

In important ways, Nagel addresses some of the significant questions raised by earlier analyses. By treating power as a dispositional concept, he answers part of Ball's critique of covering law explanations. Moreover, he provides a suitable framework for covering law explanations of power even while addressing the "anticipated reactions" and related issues that have been raised repeatedly against the pluralists. Implicitly, Nagel recognizes the distinction between "covering law" and specifically "causal" issues in explanation. He decides to adopt both--a decision that in terms of the earlier sections of this paper is obviously one that I regard as unwise. However, if one wishes to define power in terms of causation, it seems wise to adopt Simon's interpretation of causality, and this Nagel has done.⁷ Finally, in preference theory the economists have probably produced a concept more "empirically verifiable" than the broad concept of intentions is in social science.

⁷For a critical view of Simon, however, see Riker 1964: 347.

Tilly's Concept of Power

If we look at Tilly's delineation of the intellectual antecedents of current analyses of collective action, we see that Nagel's and Tilly's work arise out of quite diverse backgrounds. Despite Nagel's evident concern to respond to the intellectual challenge of the "New Left," as represented in the agenda-setting literature, his analysis is clearly within what Tilly has called the Millean framework. By contrast, while Tilly is responding to the challenge of that rigorous methodological framework (especially the literature of collective choice), his analysis and his sympathies clearly belong with what he identifies as a Marxist framework. Despite the differences, it is interesting that both find themselves drawn toward economic theory. While Nagel looks to preference theory, Tilly builds a model of power based on economic concepts of return on investment and productivity functions.

Tilly's model is an attempt to understand collective action within a covering law framework, and without reference to psychological variables (such as relative deprivation) and values, although of course since he sees collective action as largely instrumental and therefore goal-directed, obviously an assumption about intentions lies behind the model. However, what is particularly interesting about his work is that power here is not a causal concept. This is not to say that causal notions have been entirely omitted; whether it is impossible to avoid them altogether in studies of human action I am not sure, because in fact it has been argued that the original notion of cause as producing agent arose and is maintained by our analogizing from our experience as actors to nature (see Caskin 1955 and von Wright 1974). It may be impossible

to divorce our experience of human action as production, as creation, from the notion of causality, and in the long run perfectly legitimate to associate them. However, given the state of philosophy as well as of social science on the subject of causation, it seems worthwhile to try to divorce our central concepts (such as power) from philosophical issues we cannot handle. Nagel has opted for the decision that Simon's solution really is a solution. Tilly's proposal is more open-ended; we are offered a workable definition purged of causal associations.

Compare Dahl's definition of power with that of Tilly:

Dahl: "A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do." Here power is the ability to alter another's behavior, to "push" or "pull" them in a certain direction.

Tilly: "The power of that party is the extent to which its interests prevail over the others with which it is in conflict." Power here is in some sense an outcome. Power is measured by the ratio between input of resources and resources returned. However, it is not simply that power is measured by outcomes (as in Nagel's formulation) but that power itself is an outcome. The concept of power thus produced has the advantages of being both relative and relational.

Conclusion

I have argued that, given the troublesome epistemological status of the notion of causation, social scientists would do well to avoid entangling the concept of power with that of cause. The situation is made worse by the plethora of usages of the term "cause" and the adjective

"causal." We have delineated at least four: mechanical force, necessary and sufficient condition, covering law, input variable. If one rejects the suggestion that "power" and "cause" can be disentangled, then at least one ought to follow Riker's advice to specify carefully the notion of cause associated with a particular notion of power. As his skillful dissection of various definitions of power shows, one needs to be extremely careful to avoid contaminating one notion of power with an inappropriate sense of causality.

Given the ambiguities in the conception of power, ought we to follow March and Riker's suggestion to avoid it altogether? Perhaps, rather than considering the question of which notion of power to use, we ought to ask whether "power" can be usefully treated at all. But how can we avoid considering that topic? If, as is often said, the central issue in the study of politics has been "who rules" (and "who do the rules favor") and within political philosophy, "who should rule," then it seems that omitting "power" from consideration would leave a rather large hole. Moreover, the kind of pure predictionism-instrumentalism represented by James March, for example, is basically unsatisfying. That is, even if I were able to predict perfectly a good many political outcomes (elections, budgeting process outcomes, impact of demonstrations, etc.) without using the concept of power, simply by specifying some rules of the game and some numbers based on past outcomes and feeding all this into a computer, I at least would remain unsatisfied. For such predictionism only addresses the "how," not the "why." Why are the rules the way they are? Why is it, if a complex process determines the results, that those results seem systematically to favor some groups or individuals and not others? Perhaps this is the chief justification for our

preoccupation with political power. Power is a "pointer word"; it points us toward the "Why" questions. In continuing to ask these persistent questions about power, we continue to pursue, in however stumbling, confusing and irritating a manner, those basic questions about the nature of social reality.

Probably this explains the association of power with causation. Despite the epistemological confusions, we find ourselves pursuing that theme: Why did this happen? What caused it? Even if we accept the view of some scientists that there are only statistical laws, on an everyday human level it is difficult to settle for such predictionism. We do, in fact, think in terms of "causes."

But the dilemma remains. If we entangle the very concept of power with causation, the likely result will be endless and not very productive arguments like the "power elite debate." Thus the challenge seems to be to develop a conception of power that facilitates those "Why" questions and yet avoids that basic equation of power with causation.

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