

---

## The Problem of Power

The continuing debate over the problem of power highlights the fact that power remains an essentially contested concept (Lukes, 1974). This is not surprising given that "social science is essentially contestable" with "every conclusion open to argument" (Alexander, 1987, p. 25). Social science concepts such as power are often "inchoate, tacit and imperfectly articulated, they require interpretation to make them manifest. And because they are made manifest by interpretation, any particular interpretation is contestable" (Gibbons, 1987, p. 2). The contest over the meaning of power is a relatively recent event, with students of power apparently having operated with an implicit understanding of the concept until the post-World War II era (Riker, 1964). In the social sciences, the concept of power did not gain wide currency until the 1930s and 1940s (Gillam, 1971). As power's use as an analytical concept increased, social scientists undertook a search for an explicit, universal definition of power. The quest for a universal, operational definition of power touched off a debate that still rages across the social sciences. It is a problem that social scientists have been unable to solve.

While the debate continues, power has lost considerable appeal as an explanatory concept within academic circles. John R. Champlin (1971) suggests that "the term has fallen into comparative disfavor" (p. 2) because of the difficulty associated with defining power. The project of producing a universal definition of power has attracted researcher after researcher, but none has been equal to the task (McClelland, 1971). Not even Hans J. Morgenthau (1971), who claimed that "the distinctive, unifying element of politics is the struggle for power" (p. 30) was able to solve this puzzle. The failure to resolve this problem means that while power has remained "an arousing and poetic symbol," it has been "diminished from a commanding theoretical resource to a very modest abstraction for which an occasional legitimate use can be found in theory and research" (McClelland, 1971, p. 60).

The timing of power's entry into the social science lexicon may explain its rise and fall as an explanatory concept. When the modern concept of power was adopted from the mechanical sciences, the orientation of the social sciences was firmly positivistic (Joseph, 1988). The language of positivism and the logic of scientific discovery required that concepts be operationally defined and objectively measured. Herbert Simon (1957), one of the first to revive the Hobbesian concept of power in the 1950s, found that he was "unable . . . to arrive at a satisfactory solution" (p. 5) to the task of giving power an operational definition. Robert Dahl (1957, 1958, 1961, 1968) took up the challenge and sparked the lively "faces of power" debates but was no more successful than Simon had been in producing an uncontested, unproblematic definition of power. Power could not meet the demands of a positivist social science.

The purpose of this chapter is to begin the process of reconstructing and reclaiming the concept of power for use in policy analysis and research. Reconstructing power means understanding it as the thread that holds collective action together. The precise definition or meaning of power emerges from the study of collective action and is potentially different from one social context to the another. Once power has been reconstructed, it can be reclaimed. That is to say that power can become an explanatory concept that helps social scientists explicate collective action.

Several steps are required to achieve this rather ambitious goal. First, it is necessary to review the work of Thomas Hobbes and other early political philosophers in order to understand the origin and lineage of the debates on power. After this, the "faces of power" debates that have dominated much of the discourse on power since the 1950s are considered. Following this discussion, interpretivist theorists are presented as an alternative to positivistic conceptions of power. Finally, the sociology of translation is offered as a methodology that can solve the problem of power while avoiding the pitfalls of earlier approaches. It is through the use of this methodology that power can be reconstructed and reclaimed as a research concept.

## LEGISLATORS AND INTERPRETERS

Drawing on the work of Zygmunt Bauman (1987), Stewart Clegg (1989) has classified power theorists as legislators and interpreters. Legislators discuss, debate, theorize, and research the question of "What is power?" Regardless of the exact answer, power is always legislated by

some sovereignty. While the source of sovereign power (e.g., the people, the consumer, the law, or the constitution) may differ from theorist to theorist, the focus on what power is remains the central concern. Questions of how and why the sovereign rules are relegated to the periphery or simply not asked. Interpreters focus on the questions of how power is obtained, what power does, and how power is maintained.

### Legislators

Under Clegg's classification scheme, Hobbes can be seen as the first legislator and as the intellectual fountainhead of legislative theories of power. Modern legislative theorists continue the "mechanical, causal, and atomistic concept of power" (Clegg, 1989, p. 27) first articulated by Hobbes. While his original intent may not have been this grand, Hobbes's project certainly was not a modest endeavor that grew in stature only as it was recognized by future generations. From the beginning, Hobbes intended to reconstruct political theory as it then existed and to lay the theoretical foundation for modern state power.

In laying this new foundation, Hobbes had to first destroy the foundation that had been built on the work of Aristotle. For Aristotle, sovereign power in any state had to be based on the will of the people and that sovereignty was expressed through the law and the constitution. In the *Leviathan*, Hobbes (1651/1991) charged "that scare any thing can be more absurdly said in naturall Philosophy, than that which now is called *Aristotle's Metaphisiques*; nor more repugnant to Government than much that hee hath said in his *Politiques*; nor more ignorantly, than a great part of his *Ethiques*" (pp. 461–62). Of course, it was not enough to heap insult on Aristotle, Hobbes had to present an alternative formulation to challenge and replace Aristotle's sovereignty of laws. The true sovereign, claimed Hobbes, consisted not of words on paper, but of the state backed by the arms and swords of men.

Defining the new foundation is not the same as having it accepted. Lest anyone cling to the old order or suggest alternatives to the new order, Hobbes (1651/1991) warned that any deviation from his formulation would produce a world in which

there is no place for Industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no Culture of the Earth; no Navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by Sea; no commodious Building; no Instruments of moving, and removing such things as require much force; no Knowledge

of the face of the Earth; no account of Time; no Arts; no Letters; no Society; and which is worst of all, continuall feare and danger of violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short. (p. 89)

Finally, in addition to making alternatives seem irrational and frightening, Hobbes sought to give his new conception of sovereignty legitimacy by cloaking it in the language of the new science. Power ceased to be some religious or metaphysical force that could not be understood, shaped, or controlled by humans. Power became a simple matter of mechanics in which one agent pushed (cause) another agent to act (effect). Political power was a matter of agents acting on one another in "a perpetuall and restlesse desire of Power after power, that ceaseth onely in Death" (Hobbes, 1651/1991, p. 70).

Hobbes's mechanical, causal concept of power was taken up and refined first by John Locke (1689/1959) and then later by David Hume (1748/1920). Locke also used the language of cause and effect, adding the metaphor of the billiard table to demonstrate the principles of active and passive power. Active agents on the table, moving balls, strike passive patients, stationary balls, causing them to move. Power is cause and effect with active agents demonstrating their power through effects on passive patients. Taking this idea beyond Hobbes, Locke claimed that power produced observable change and movement among the agents. Power, like natural phenomena, could be observed and measured. This was the only way that one could scientifically study and prove the existence of power.

While Hume used tennis balls to illustrate his views on power, he maintained the concept of power as a mechanical push and pull, cause and effect, that could be observed and measured. Hume added scientific rigor to the study of power by insisting that it should be possible to observe the events producing the cause and effect that constituted power. From repeated observations of the events producing cause and effect, Hume believed that lawlike generalizations about power could be produced.

The Hobbes, Locke, and Hume discourse on sovereignty and power was so forceful that it virtually eliminated any alternative approaches to the question of power. By cloaking discourse on power in the language of science, they represented power as a legitimate, if sometimes arbitrary, force of nature. Rival concepts of power had to either continue along the same conceptual path of cause and effect, or risk being labeled irrational and unscientific. The social sciences' adoption of the natural sciences as a model for inquiry only reinforced

the dominance of Hobbes, Locke, and Hume. Even Karl Marx, who challenged the legitimacy of the standing economic order, defined power in positivistic terms of cause and effect. The meaning of power became a matter of implicit understanding even as its philosophical origins were forgotten. This helps explain how students of power were able to operate with an implicit understanding of the meaning of power for three centuries after Hobbes first offered his views on the state and power without fully understanding the origin of that meaning or how it shaped the discourse on power.

### *The Faces of Power*

The implicit meaning of power that evolved from the work of the British political philosophers held such a strong grip on students of power that the problem of power was removed from the mainstream of intellectual discourse until the 1950s. The faces of power debates represents a reopening and a continuation of legislative theory. Ironically, the participants used many of the same types of metaphors as the early political philosophers, but without any apparent awareness of their origin. Power became an exercise in cause and effect that in the new language of the behavioral sciences could be observed, measured, and predicted.

Floyd Hunter's (1953) study of the community power structure of Atlanta, Georgia, is most often cited as the study that reopened the problem of power for discussion and debate in the intellectual community. Concerned with the question of whether or not representational democracy was giving way to local community power elites, Hunter developed a reputational methodology that became the model for subsequent studies of community power structures. In simplified form, Hunter asked people chosen as judges to list the most influential people in the community and then determined whether or not the combined listings produced an elite. What Hunter found was a shift in power from the people to an elite heavily weighted towards business.

If Hunter reopened the debate over power, then C. Wright Mills (1956) exploded the issue with the publication of *The Power Elite*. Naming names, identifying positions, and revealing what he saw as a system of interlocking institutions, Mills (1956) defined the power elite as

men whose positions enable them to transcend the ordinary environments of ordinary men and women. . . . For they are

in command of the major hierarchies and organizations of modern society. They rule the big corporations. They run the machinery of state and claim its prerogatives. They direct the military establishment. They occupy the strategic command posts of the social structure, in which are now centered the effective means of the power and the wealth and the celebrity which they enjoy. (pp. 3-4)

Robert Dahl (1957, 1958) responded to power elite theorists and in the process launched the faces of power debate that continues to dominate much of the discourse on the meaning of power. Dahl's response to power elite theorists, and to Mills in particular, was remarkably reminiscent of Hobbes' approach. First, Dahl (1958) sought to discredit the work of power elite theorists claiming that their "hypothesis has one very great advantage over many alternative explanations: It can be cast in a form that makes it virtually impossible to disprove" (p. 463). Even worse, the theory was charged with being "quasi-metaphysical" (Dahl, 1958, p. 463). Last, Dahl (1958) sought to dismiss the power elitists by charging that "a theory that cannot even in principle be controverted by empirical evidence is not a scientific theory" (p. 463).

The last point became the basis of a withering attack on Mills and other power elite theorists. Operating from a positivist perspective, Dahl brought Mills to task for failing to define a ruling elite that could be observed, measured, and analyzed. Since Mills had failed to do this, Dahl provided a definition based on Mills' work, and then presented a method for testing the power elite theory. In sum, Dahl (1958) claimed that the power elite hypothesis could be tested if, and only if:

1. The hypothetical ruling elite is a well-defined group.
2. There is a fair sample of cases involving key political decisions in which the preferences of the hypothetical ruling elite run counter to those of any other likely group that might be suggested.
3. In such cases, the preferences of the elite regularly prevail. (p. 466)

Like Hobbes, Dahl also understood that it was not enough to discredit and dismiss rival theorists. As an alternative to power elite theorists, Dahl had to offer a new theory of power. The new theory had to make other theories appear irrational, if not unthinkable. To

accomplish this goal, Dahl (1968) followed Simon's lead in grounding power in the language of mechanics to shape the discourse on power and firmly anchor it in the positivist paradigm.

In place of Mills's rather vague conception of power, Dahl presented a precise operational definition. Continuing the mechanical metaphors of Hobbes, Locke, and Hume, Dahl (1957) defined his intuitive idea of power as "something like this: A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do" (pp. 202-3). Implicit in Dahl's (1957) definition was the understanding that "power is a relation, and that it is a relation among people" (p. 203). Finally, Dahl noted that questions of the base, means, amount, and scope of power had to be addressed in any comprehensive study of power.

Dahl's critique of the power elite and his pluralist model of power dominated the field of power research and analysis well into the 1960s. By successfully framing the criteria and tests that competing theorists had to meet, Dahl limited the range of alternatives to the pluralist model and to refinements of that model. For example, Newton (1969) mounted a strong attack on *Who Governs?* (Dahl, 1961), but accepted Dahl's definition of power. In many ways, it can be argued that while Newton arrives at quite different conclusions about who held power, it is Dahl's methodology that guides the inquiry. The use of this methodology explains why Newton and other challengers to Dahl could see but one face or dimension of power.

Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz (1962), in a stinging critique of Dahl, argued that power has two faces. Dahl was correct in describing the one face of power, but his project was seriously flawed because of his inability or unwillingness to examine the second face of power. The other, less visible, face of power is the extent to which "a person or group—consciously or unconsciously—creates or reinforces barriers to the public airing of policy conflicts" (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962, p. 949). Specifically, two individuals or groups must have a conflict of interests; B must accept A's position, and A must have some sanction to use against B should B fail to comply (Bachrach & Baratz, 1970). This second face of power was described as a non-decision-making process.

Non-decision making, or the second face of power, built on and refined Dahl's theory in several important ways. The most obvious improvement was that it allowed researchers to account for power that might be hidden or exercised covertly in ways that could not be directly observed or measured. A second improvement was the use of E. E. Schattschneider's (1960) concept of the "mobilization of bias" to

expand the definition of power beyond individuals to include structural relationships. Last, Bachrach and Baratz went beyond Dahl by boldly claiming that power must be interpreted as well as observed and measured.

Anticipating the criticism that their theory would provoke, Bachrach and Baratz (1962) rejected "in advance as unimpressive the possible criticism that this approach to the study of power is likely to prove fruitless because it goes beyond an investigation of what is objectively measurable" (p. 952). Rejecting criticism does not forestall it; non-decision making was vigorously attacked by those who followed Dahl and those who subscribed to the belief that power existed only to the extent that it could be observed and measured. Nelson Polsby (1980) summarized this line of criticism with the questions: "How to study this second face of power? To what manifestations of social reality might the mobilization of bias refer? Are phenomena of this sort amenable to empirical investigation?" (p. 190). The criticism took its toll on Bachrach and Baratz (1970), who moved from defiance to compliance with the admission that "although absence of conflict may be a non-event, a decision which results in prevention of conflict is very much an event—and an observable one, to boot" (p. 46).

While Bachrach and Baratz ceded to the pressures of the positivist paradigm, Steven Lukes (1974) sought to reinforce non-decision-making theory as a legitimate dimension of power and to move beyond it to a third face or dimension of power. In describing this third face of power, Lukes explicitly linked his view of power to the definitions of power produced by Dahl and by Bachrach and Baratz. As Lukes (1974) states the connection, all three "can be seen as alternative interpretations and applications of one and the same underlying concept of power, according to which A exercises power over B when A affects B in a manner contrary to B's interests" (p. 27).

Although Lukes continues the causal definition of power that dates from Hobbes, his introduction of the concept of interests distinguishes him from his theoretical predecessors. According to Lukes, interests in the first two faces of power are subjective interests and the concept of interests is not fully developed in either of the faces. Subjective interests are somewhat akin to the Marxist concept of false consciousness. People are operating under an illusion of their real interests. In his radical view of power, Lukes (1974) brings objective interests to the forefront to provide "a license for the making of normative judgments of a moral and political character" (p. 34). Lukes does not reference a model of objective interests but seems to



have in mind a model like Jürgen Habermas's (1979) ideal speech situation, that is, when people know what their real interests are and are unconstrained in their participation in the discourse over those interests.

With this understanding of the concept of interests, one can begin to visualize the three faces of power. The first face is a primitive face in which A openly forces B to do something against his/her will. The second face is more sophisticated in that B does not act because she/he thinks or knows that A does not want him/her to act, or because A creates barriers that limit B. In the third face of power, A has power over B's formation of interests so that B is unable to act on his/her real interests. Lukes (1978) summarizes the third face of power with the question, "Is not the supreme exercise of power to avert conflict and grievance by influencing, shaping, and determining the perceptions and preferences of others?" (p. 669).

The third face of power stretched the causal definition of power to its limits without renouncing the positivist paradigm. Lukes avoids this break by offering an observer who can determine the objective interests of the subjects when the subjects are not fully aware of their own best interests. In ideal situations, the subjects are able to determine their own objective interests. Lukes, after stretching the causal definition of power to its limits, accepts Hobbes's causal definition of power and safely returns to Locke's view that power must be observable.

The emphasis here on the faces of power debates should not obscure the fact that other attempts were being made to define power during the same time period. For example, Nicos Poulantzas (1986) defined power as "the capacity of a social class to realize its objective interests" (p. 144). For Marxists and Neo-Marxists, sovereignty was exercised by the ruling elite through the class system. Talcott Parsons (1951, 1963, 1967) approached power in a manner similar to Hobbes and Dahl but sought to fit the concept of power into his general theory of action. It seemed that no one was "able to eschew the model of Leviathan in the study of power" (Foucault, 1986, p. 237) and everyone was looking for a singular, universal definition of power.

C. Wright Mills (1959) termed this search for universal concepts and theories the search for "Grand Theory." Grand Theory deals "in conceptions intended to be of use in classifying all social relations and providing insight into their supposedly invariant features" (Mills, 1959, p. 23). Grand theorists work with generalities at a level of abstraction that renders their work virtually meaningless for other researchers and for the public. The result is "an elaborate and arid

formalism" that robs ideas of any historical and social context (Mills, 1959, p. 23).

The search for a Grand Theory of power produced numerous cul-de-sacs, but no grand highways leading to greater understanding and knowledge of power. Put another way, the search for a universal definition of power produced any number of useful concepts, but these were limited to certain settings or contexts. This would seem to be a helpful contribution to the understanding of power, but these concepts were abandoned as researchers renewed their quest for a definition or concept of power that was true at all times and in all places. It fell to interpretivist theorists, working in a different research tradition, "to cut off the King's head" (Foucault, 1980, p. 121) and advance the discourse on power beyond cause and effect definitions.

### *Interpreters*

In contrast to legislators who are concerned with the question of "What is power?" interpreters are concerned with how power is obtained, what power does, and how it is maintained. Interpretivist theorists focus on "strategies, deals, negotiation, fraud and conflict" (Clegg, 1989, p. 30). Interpreters, whose lineage runs back to Niccolo Machiavelli (1513/1977), are not concerned with legislating the definition of power, but rather with translating the meaning of power as it appears in different social contexts. This means that interpretivist theorists do not focus on issues of agency, causality, or motion that are so important to legislative theorists. Instead, like Machiavelli, they tend to use an "ethnographic research method for uncovering the rules of the game" (Clegg, 1989, p. 31).

What separates the intellectual descendants of Hobbes and Machiavelli is more than a concern with particular questions or methods to follow in the study of power. What truly separates legislators and interpreters is the choice of metaphors that Hobbes and Machiavelli originally used to drive their work and which continue to drive the work of their intellectual heirs. As discussed above, Hobbes used the language and metaphors of the mechanical sciences to describe and define power. Machiavelli (1513/1977), in contrast, took the language and metaphors of armies and war as can be seen in this quotation from *The Prince*:

A prince, therefore, should have no other object, no other thought, no other subject of study, than war, its rules and disciplines; this is the only art for a man who commands, and

it is of such value [*virtu*] that it not only keeps born princes in place, but often raises men from private citizens to princely fortune. On the other hand, it is clear that when princes have thought more about the refinements of life than about war, they have lost their positions. The quickest way to lose a state is to neglect this art; the quickest way to get one is to study it. (p. 42)

The differences in language and metaphors produces entirely different epistemological and ontological approaches to the question of power. For interpreters, power is a socially constructed reality: thus there is not a single foundation from which all interpreters build their theories of power. The lack of a common foundation means that interpretivist theorists are not bound by a common thread in the way that legislators are bound by the question of "What is power?" Since there is no one single meaning and definition of power, interpretivists are not linked by a common research methodology. This makes it much more difficult to summarize and group interpretivists because different schools and individuals have developed their own distinct approaches to the study of power with the only commonality being interpretation.

Rather than attempt to provide a summary paragraph or two on the different individuals and various schools of thought that represent the interpretivist tradition from Machiavelli to the present, this section will trace the development of just one interpretive approach to power: the communications concept. This approach is presented as an example of interpretivist theory for two reasons. First, it is possible to trace the historical development of the communications concept in a way that parallels the above description of the faces of power debate, thus enabling the reader to compare the development of ideas grounded in two rather different research traditions. Second, communications was recognized as an issue in the early mechanical conceptions of power but was ignored because the mechanical sciences model did not have to deal with the problem of communications between objects and political philosophers had no conceptual tools to account for the problem of communications between humans in their definitions of power.

The precursor of modern communicative action theory is found in the work of John Dewey. In *The Public and Its Problems*, Dewey (1927/1988) implies, but does not fully develop, the concept of a communication community. The details of Dewey's communication community must be teased out by the reader. Dewey's theory of a communication community starts with, rather than ends in, the process of collective action. The product of collective action, regardless of how well it is

conceived and planned, produces unintended or unanticipated consequences for the public. As these consequences become apparent, the institutions responsible for implementing the public will and the public interact to produce a new decision. Of paramount importance in this process is communication between individuals and institutions who are either affected by a decision or are concerned with the consequences of any new decision.

Dewey's trust in the communication community reveals a political philosophy that is radically different from both Hobbes and Machiavelli. Instead of seeing a natural antagonism between the public and the state, Dewey sees a community bonded together by communication. The public, a true democratic public, emerges from the communication required by group problem solving. The same is true of democratic governments that exist as a function of the collective action process. Communication for problem solving, not force of arms, becomes the mechanism for social order in the communication community.

As sketched by Dewey, the communication community is a lively, free-wheeling society, but one that also places a heavy moral and political responsibility on its citizens. Individuals must be aware of community issues, the consequences of collective actions, the needs of society, and must make decisions based on the needs of the community without the possibility of passing the burden for decision making on to some higher authority or outside agent. In the communication community, power as domination is replaced by power as problem solving, thus the public must take responsibility for solving its problems. If the public fails to take responsibility, there is no external system of social control, and the internal system of social order begins to unravel.

Dewey (1927/1988) claimed that the communication community would "have its consummation when free social inquiry is indissolubly wedded to the art of full and moving communication" (p. 184) but recognized that certain prerequisites were necessary for consummation to occur. One of the prerequisites was a common language that could be used and understood by all of the community. Language by itself was not enough to foster fully understood communications. The public also needed widely understood signs and symbols to convey shared meanings. In addition, groups needed to interact in cooperative activities because "the pulls and responses of different groups reenforce one another and their values accord" (Dewey, 1927/1988, p. 148). The shared activities also produce emotional, intellectual, and moral bonds that help bind the community. To the extent that these prerequisites

are met, a community evolves that is capable of transforming the power of domination into the power of problem solving.

One of the criticisms of Dewey was that he tended to present concepts and theories only to leave them underdeveloped as he raced on to new ideas. Unfortunately, this is true of the communication community introduced in *The Public and Its Problems*. After its publication in 1927, Dewey moved on to other ideas leaving the details of a fully developed communication community for other thinkers and writers. It was not until the 1960s that the theory of communicative power was addressed again.

Hannah Arendt was the next person to take up the concept of communicative power. While she does not cite Dewey, her work, rests on a similar theoretical foundation. Arendt's (1968, 1969, 1986) theory of communicative power developed out of her concern with violence. Arendt (1969) increasingly came to see "the events and debates of the last few years as seen against the background of the twentieth century, which has become indeed, as Lenin predicted, a century of wars and revolutions, hence a century of . . . violence" (p. 3). The increasing level of violence in political life reached the point that it was "taken for granted and therefore neglected" (Arendt, 1969, p. 8) by social scientists. Perhaps worst of all, political theorists had come to view power and violence as concomitant. C. Wright Mills (1956) claim that "all politics is a struggle for power; the ultimate kind of power is violence" (p. 171) is a primary example of what Arendt had in mind when she accused political theorists of uncritically accepting the wedding of violence and power.

The intent of Arendt's project was to separate violence and power and to produce a new concept of power that was not based on domination. Traditional political theory traces the roots of power back to the absolute power of kings and even back to Greek antiquity in defining power in terms of domination. Arendt (1969) sought to draw on "another tradition and another vocabulary no less old and time-honored" (p. 40). The Athenian city-state and the Romans both developed concepts of governments that rested "on the power of the people" (Arendt, 1969, p. 40). The state and all political institutions rested on the power of the people and "they petrify and decay as soon as the living power of the people ceases to uphold them" (Arendt, 1969, p. 41). Violence could be used to hold a government in place, but power could only come from the consent of the governed.

While Arendt did not discuss the role of metaphors in shaping visions of power, she understand the role of language and the need to create a new vocabulary for her discourse on power. Of primary

concern was the need to produce distinct, separate definitions for power, strength, force, authority, and violence to avoid the inherent tendency of political theorists to “reduce public affairs to the business of dominion” (Arendt, 1969, p. 44). While all of the definitions are worth considering, only Arendt’s (1969) definitions of power and violence are repeated here:

*Power* corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together. ( p. 44)

*Violence*, finally, as I have said, is distinguished by its instrumental character. Phenomenologically, it is close to strength, since the implements of violence, like all other tools, are designed and used for the purpose of multiplying natural strength until, in the last stage of their development, they can substitute for it. (p. 46)

By carefully defining the language used to discuss power, Arendt sought to give legitimacy to certain types of social behavior while making still other types of behavior socially unacceptable. Arendt’s interest in legitimation parallels Talcott Parsons’ (1963) concern with the legitimacy of the possession and use of power in a social system. To solve the problem of what is and what is not legitimate power, Parsons took his cue from economic theory. Power, like money in an economic system, was considered a circulating medium that was generated by the political system. Power was legitimate only so long as it was accepted by members of a society and the leaders of the society had a mandate from the members to act in their behalf. Arendt (1986) took her cue from natural law to arrive at the social contract as the mechanism for giving legitimacy to power. Power is legitimate only as long, and only so long, as it comes from the governed and is expressed in a social contract or agreement. Neither resolution of the problem allows a legitimate role for violence, but both resolutions permit the use of force in fulfilling the goals of society.

As noted earlier, Arendt and Dewey’s work rests on similar theoretical foundations. Both view power as the formation of a common will developed from acting in concert through communicative action rather than as an instrument of domination. For Arendt (1969), power “corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert” (p. 44), thus paralleling Dewey’s focus on collective action. As a

condition of acting in concert, both argue that citizens must be free and equal. In Arendt's work it is this freedom that permits the building of communicative action that allows written social contracts to be developed. Power exists only so long as citizens agree to the granting of power, through a written social contract, to an individual or an agency.

Jürgen Habermas (1986) praises Arendt's work for allowing us to disconnect "the concept of power from the teleological model" and to think of power as being "built up in communicative action" (p. 76). At the same time, he criticizes her thesis as being "a bit too smooth" because "it is not a result of well-balanced investigations but issues from a philosophical construction . . . which, when applied to modern societies, leads to absurdities" (Habermas, 1986, pp. 82-83). Specifically, Habermas cites Arendt's failure to account for the strategic competition for political power, the employment of power within the political system, and her reliance on the contract theory of natural law as major flaws in her communications concept of power. Despite this rather strong criticism, Habermas believed that Arendt's communicative action concept was fundamentally sound and used it as the basis for developing his own theory of communicative action.

Habermas's theory of communicative action is part of a larger program of rearticulating the project of critical theory. The premise of communicative action theory is "that language as communicative discourse is *emancipatory*, but also that communicative forms of discourse have a certain priority over other forms of linguistic usage" (Rasmussen, 1990, p. 18). The purpose of the theory of communicative action is to help develop a philosophy of language, in place of a philosophy of consciousness, for use in his project. A philosophy of language can serve as the guardian and basis for the development communicative action. Clearly, a full discussion of the theory of communicative action is beyond our focus, but key aspects of the theory can be presented.

The core idea in Habermas's (1979,1984,1987) theory of communicative action is communicative competence. The achievement of communicative competence depends on the ability and willingness of speakers to state propositional sentences in a way that are cognitively true, without intent to deceive the listener, and in a manner consistent with the normative orientation of the speaker and listener. For example, communicative competence is reached when participants in discussions recognize the differences between true and false statements and accept as true statements those that would be accepted as true statements in the absence of coercion.

As part of his reconstruction of rational society, Habermas (1984) makes certain assumptions that give communicative action priority over

all other forms of action. Specifically, Habermas asserts that action takes the form of either strategic action or communicative action. Strategic action is purposive-rational action in which communication is instrumental. Communicative action is noninstrumental in the sense that "a communicatively achieved agreement has a rational basis; it cannot be imposed by either party, whether instrumentally through intervention in the situation directly or strategically through influencing decisions of opponents" (Habermas, 1984, p. 287). Communicative action has priority over, and cannot be reduced to, strategic action because it can be demonstrated "that the use of language with an orientation to reaching an understanding is the *original mode* of language use, upon which indirect understanding, giving something to understand or letting something be understood, and the instrumental use of language in general, are parasitic" (Habermas, 1984, pp. 288–92). Communicative action thus becomes the foundation on which community is constructed.

Habermas (1979, 1987) has used the two types of action as the basis for constructing a two-level concept of society. The economic system and political administration are action spheres characterized by strategic action. Rather than responding to normative values, these spheres are coordinated and driven by money, power, and success without regard for communicative competence. Detached from the action system is the life-world. The life-world is characterized by the drive to reach communicative competence and is coordinated through full, open, and truthful communication. This dualism helps protect communication from the distortions of power.

The division of the world into separate, nonintersecting spheres with different foundations has produced considerable criticism as has the privileging of communicative action over all other forms of action. Axel Honneth (1987) has suggested that Habermas is building his project on a theoretical fiction if he really believes that the two spheres can exist independently. Michel Foucault (1986) has noted that communication and knowledge, far from freeing us, have been servants to disciplinary power and subjection. In Habermasian terms, one would say that the life-world has become the handmaiden of the action system. Despite these and other criticisms, Habermas remains the best known and most respected proponent of communicative action.

In examining his large body of work, it is easy to see how Habermas (1979, 1984, 1987) builds on Dewey and Arendt in the development of his theory of communicative action. At the core of Habermas's theory is the idea of uncoerced communication between competent participants. Communicative competence rests upon the ability and



willingness of participants to speak without the intent to deceive. A communicative community rests on a foundation of trust reinforced by unrestrained communication. Power, the power to dominate, is a barrier to building a communicative community because power interferes with and distorts universal communication, thus it is relegated to a separate sphere.

While, Dewey, Arendt, and Habermas are linked by the common thread of communicative action, it is important to note differences that separate the three theorists. Dewey bases his communication community on praxis. Consistent with his pragmatic philosophy, the community is never complete but is constantly evolving, through collective action, in search of a more perfect community. Power is found in the ability of the community to engage in problem solving. Arendt also sees power as coming from communicative action aimed at reaching agreement. Unlike Dewey, she envisions a more static community in which agreements are reached within the boundaries of a written social contract rather than through praxis. Finally, Habermas, with his explicit rules for defining communicative action, creates an ideal theory to which a community can aspire and against which it can judge its level of communicative competence. Unlike Arendt and Dewey, Habermas does not accept the idea that power can be transformed into a social good that promotes communicative action, but sees power as distorting communications.

In summary, Clegg's system of classifying and categorizing power theorists is useful on many counts, but selecting one approach or theory to guide the study of power remains problematic at best. For legislators, the problem is one of finding a definition of power that applies at all times and in all places. It seems that legislators have given themselves a task that is impossible to fulfill. Indeed, the difficulty associated with defining and studying power has produced a division among political scientists with some claiming that power is no longer a useful concept and others claiming that it must be *the* guiding concept for political science (Falkemark, 1982).

Interpreters have avoided the problem of finding a universal definition of power, but have created a different set of problem by defining power a posteriori. Critics of interpretivist approaches claim that far from interpreting power, interpreters find only the "facts" that fit their theory of power. Other critics note that theories of political power, whether legislative or interpretive, tend to coincide with disciplinary perspectives and worldviews. Political scientists ask how the state influences society and discover that power is pluralistic. Some political scientists find that pluralism is too simple and offer non-decision

making as an alternative. In contrast, sociologists generally ask how society influences the state and find a power elite or ruling class. The meaning of power is not a matter of interpretation, but rather a function of the methodology and theory selected to guide the inquiry.

## SOCIOLOGY OF TRANSLATION

As one looks at the problem of power, it appears that Dahl's (1957) concern that power research could turn into a "bottomless swamp" (p. 201) has become a reality. It may be possible to avoid this swamp by using an eclectic assortment of research methods to reconstruct and reclaim power for use in policy analysis and research. This suggests some combination of cultural, historical, political, and sociological methods with the common thread being interpretation. The starting point for this design is Michel Callon and Bruno Latour's (1981) sociology of translation. In using this as a starting point one neither accepts or rejects extant theories of power. Instead, one is acknowledging that a theory or concept can reach "the point where it obscures a good deal more than it reveals" (Geertz, 1973, p. 4). Use of the methodological framework suggested by Callon and Latour presents one with a clearer field of vision unimpeded by a priori interpretations or theories of power. The meaning of power must truly emerge from the social and historical context in which it is being studied.

Callon and Latour are not the first to suggest that power must be understood by interpreting it in the social context in which it is situated. What makes their work of particular interest is that they have developed an explicitly stated methodological framework that can be understood and followed by other researchers. The principles that guide the translation model and the "moments" of translation are discussed below.

The sociology of translation developed out of Callon and Latour's concern with the paradox inherent in the problem of power. In summary form, the paradox can be stated as follows: "when you simply *have* power—in *potentia*—nothing happens and you are powerless; when you *exert* power—in *actu*—others are performing the action and not you" (Latour, 1986, pp. 264–65). This paradox has been repeated methodologically as social scientists treated power as both cause and effect. Latour (1986) suggests that one way out of this paradox is to think of power as a way to summarize the consequences of collective action. The translation model was designed to "allow social scientists to understand power as a consequence and not as a cause of collective

action" (Latour, 1986, p. 269). To understand power, one must understand what holds the collective action together. It is only then that power can be named and defined.

Three methodological principles guide the researcher who elects to use the sociology of translation as a guide to the study of power (Callon, 1986). The first principle is agnosticism. The researcher must be an impartial observer who refrains from privileging any one point of view or censoring any respondent. The second principle is generalized symmetry. This principle requires that the researcher use the same vocabulary and terms when describing and explaining the actors in the study. The third principle is free association. This means that a researcher must not impose an a priori grid of analysis on the actors, but must observe the actors to determine how they "define and associate the different elements by which they build and explain their world, whether it be social or natural" (Callon, 1986, p. 201).

Translation is used to refer to all of "negotiations, intrigues, calculations, acts of persuasion and violence" (Callon & Latour, 1981, p. 279) that actors use to gain the authority to speak for other actors in the political process. It is the process that allows micro-actors to become macro-actors with the authority to speak for other actors and to speak with one voice. The translation process can be divided into four steps or "moments": problematization, interessement, enrollment, and mobilization (Callon, 1986). The steps overlap and mix in a far more complex social interaction than is suggested by the simple linear presentation provided below. Translation is a continuous process and any description is at best a snapshot that quickly ages as the process moves forward in a never-ending reenactment of the translation steps.

### *Problematization*

In the first step in the translation process, the actor attempts to either convince other actors that his/her definition of the problem is the correct definition or that her/his solution is the proper solution for a given problem definition. By accomplishing this, the actor gains the right to speak for other actors. Equally important is the control thus gained over the range of policy options available for responding to public problems.

The implications of problematization extend beyond this to the creation of policy arenas. Policy arenas are created by marking off two distinct boundaries. In the case of the higher education policy arena, the first boundary is the one that divides higher education from other policy issues while the second marks off what can and cannot be

problematized within the higher education policy arena. The first boundary was drawn some time ago by Congress and is beyond the focus of this study. By creating education committees and subcommittees in the House and Senate, Congress established a recognized policy territory that is largely off limits to other committees. Within this closed domain, policy actors, over time, have developed a language, a logic, and a coherence that drives the higher education policy formation process.

The second boundary, between what can and cannot be problematized, exists within the confines of the first boundary. Unlike the boundary that separates higher education from other policy arenas, this internal boundary is subject to constant contest and conflict. The ideal solution for policy actors within the arena is to place their problems/solutions into black boxes (Callon & Latour, 1981). Black boxes contain issues that are accepted within the policy arena and are no longer subject to contest. The more black boxes actors control the greater the area of the policy arena they can control. It also means that an actor can safely leave these issues and move to problematize other issues. Of course, no matter how successful an actor might be in organizing black boxes, they seldom remain securely closed because other policy actors are always attempting to open the boxes.

### *Interessement*

An actor's definition of the problem and/or solution is not an adequate step in itself because other actors will attempt to position themselves to control the policy agenda. This means that an actor must make his/her position interesting to actors who have committed to or expressed interest in another problem definition/solution. This is what Callon and Latour call *interessement*. To be successful in this step, an actor must come between two other actors and win the supporting actor over to his/her position. In other words, the actor must win the agents of other actors to her/his position.

### *Enrollment*

The third step builds on the first two steps by seeking to build stable alliances and coalitions around the problem definition/solution. This step, called enrollment, may or may not produce stable alliances and coalitions that last beyond the current policy action. If it does, then the strength of the actor is enhanced, but what is important for the process is that the actors remain enrolled until the policy decision is reached.