

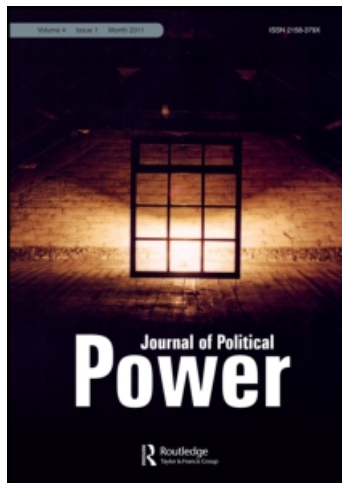
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Perspectives on power

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There are many contrasting and seemingly incompatible concepts of power: the three dimensions of power, subjective and objective power, power-to and power-over, power as ability, power as influence, etc. I will argue that the best way to understand the unity of these notions of power is to consider power from the internal perspective of an agent deliberating about how to exercise power. But not all internal perspectives on power are equally illuminating: the conceptually richest perspective on power is the internal perspective of morally conscientious agents who seek to exercise power responsibly. Our analysis of power ought to track the distinctions and considerations of those who deliberate responsibly about the exercise of power. This internal and practical perspective on power will illuminate many theoretical puzzles about power.

Keywords: power; social theory; soft power; Peter Morriss; H.L.A. Hart

1. Embarrassing questions

The American adventure in Iraq has provoked conflicting and even paradoxical assertions about American power. Many observers describe the invasion of Iraq as an awe-inspiring manifestation of American super- or hyper-power. Which other nation could project such massive force halfway around the globe, turning a regional power upside down and reshaping the politics of the Middle East? Yet other observers describe the same events as a cautionary tale about the limits of American power. After many years, Americans have accomplished almost none of their stated goals, whether it is finding weapons of mass destruction, defeating the terrorists or creating a stable democratic regime. Hence, the war in Iraq exemplifies both American power and American impotence.

These two opposing but intuitively plausible interpretations of the war illustrate two common understandings of power. If by power we mean sheer causal influence, then Iraq is a very impressive display of American power, since Americans have transformed almost every aspect of Iraq's polity and society. If power, in Robert Dahl's influential definition, means to get others to do things they would not otherwise do, then, again, Americans must have exercised immense power in Iraq, since the Iraqis are daily doing innumerable things they would never have done, such as blowing up American soldiers and Iraqi civilians. And yet, despite an immense cost in blood and treasure, America has to date accomplished few if any of its goals in Iraq, beyond removing Saddam Hussein. So there is something odd about describing the war as a manifestation of our power. If power is defined in terms of a capacity to realize one's

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goals, then Americans seem almost powerless to realize their aims for a peaceful and democratic Iraq.

The conceptual confusion surrounding the notion of power is especially embarrassing for political scientists, since the very discipline of political science is often defined as the study of power (Dahl 1986, p. 37).¹ Philosophers, such as Peter Morriss (1987), have developed a comprehensive analysis of the concept of power, creating the opening for a mutually beneficial exchange between philosophy and the social sciences. Morriss argues that power defined in terms of a capacity to realize one's aims is logically and semantically prior to the sense of power as merely the production of causal effects, which he calls 'influence.' So in his terms, America has exercised great influence on Iraq but very little real power. There is no doubt that Morriss has greatly clarified our understanding of power and has caused some of the leading social scientific theorists of power, such as Steven Lukes (2005), to revise their positions. Should political scientists follow the lead of the philosophers here and limit their use of the concept of power to a capacity for effective intentional action? Or should political scientists insist that the study of power must also include sheer causal influence? After all, most Iraqis consider themselves to be the victims of American power even if not of American intentions. Although there is a sharp conceptual distinction between the semantics of power and the semantics of influence, in the practical deliberations of agents, especially of statesmen, any course of action will bring about both intended and unintended consequences. In other words, any significant decision will necessarily involve both the exercise of power and the exercise of influence. So although power and influence are theoretically quite distinct, from the point of view of practical reasoning, they are inextricably intertwined. We distinguish in order to unite: the conceptual contrast between power and influence becomes much less salient for an agent who is responsible, though in different ways, for both the effects of his power and of his influence.

For too long, political scientists have studied power from the outside: power was understood as the cause of various observable effects. In the classic behavioral analysis, I have power if I can get you to do something you would not otherwise do – even if what you do is contrary to my intention. This externalist perspective tends to reduce power to mere causal influence. In this sense, the philosophers have been right to emphasize that the semantics of power are fundamentally different from the semantics of influence: power in the sense of a capacity to realize my aims is quite distinct from power as sheer causal influence. But this semantic analysis is also a kind of externalist perspective on power in the sense that it does not arise from the deliberations of agents who seek to exercise power responsibly. I shall attempt to explore power from a perspective internal to the deliberations of persons who exercise power: conscientious agents care both about power as the realization of intentions and about power as sheer causal influence. From this internalist perspective, we must be concerned both with our capacity to effect our goals and with our simple capacity to affect others, willy-nilly. Those who exercise power responsibly care about their goals and about their influence. Indeed, political philosophers have long observed that in politics the unintended effects of our policies often overwhelm and undermine our intended goals. Every conscientious statesman must deliberate about the interaction of his willful exercise of power and his foreseeable influence.

The question of power is both a theoretical question of how to understand social and political life and an intensely practical question of how to improve the practical reasoning of people who exercise power and wish to do so responsibly. The literature

on power in philosophy and political science has been very abstract and theoretical: it focuses on defining the concept of power, the semantics of power, and the logic of power relations. There has been very little attention paid to the question of how a theoretical analysis of power might relate to the practical reasoning of agents who exercise power. Where scholars do address questions of practice, they do so by arguing that inadequate or distorted views of power lead to bad practical reasoning. Morriss, for example, persuasively shows, as we shall see below, that defining power in terms of domination tends to distort our understanding of claims for women's or black power.

These theoretical analyses of power, to the extent that they notice practice at all, do so on the presumption that practical reasoning is simply an application of theoretical reasoning. The scholar must develop concepts so that agents can deploy them in practice; if scholars work out a good theory of power, then perhaps agents can use it to improve their practical reasoning. The notion that practice is the application of theory to concrete circumstances is a familiar one from the example of science and engineering. Engineering is in many respects the application of theoretical science to human practice. Engineers borrow their basic principles from theoretical physics, chemistry, and biology and then apply them to particular practical problems. Is, then, the relation of moral and political theory to moral and political practice like that of science to engineering? Some philosophers have certainly thought so: Plato's *Protagoras* considers a theoretical science of pleasure as the basis for practical ethics, and ever since Bentham, utilitarian theorists have both attempted to develop a science of happiness and considered how to apply it to practical ethics.

Yet, ever since Aristotle strongly distinguished theoretical from practical reason, other philosophers have attempted to defend the relative autonomy of practical reason. They argue that practical reason has its own first principles, and it is not simply the application of theory to practice. Of course, Aristotle and others insisted that a practical philosophy could use theory to refine and to correct the judgments of practical reason, but that a practical philosophy must begin with the thought of good practical agents. This is what Aristotle means by his claim that the starting point of ethical and political philosophy is the judgment of the practically wise man (*spoudaios*).

So to answer the question of whether the concept of power should be limited to the notion of a capacity for effectively realizing one's aims or should it also include a capacity for sheer causal influence, I will ask another question: how does a conscientious person deliberate about the exercise of power? Does such a person focus exclusively on how to realize his/her goals? Or does he/she also consider how to avoid causing unintentional harm to others? I think it is clear that conscientious persons are concerned not merely with achieving their intended goals but also with reducing the harmful side-effects of the exercise of their power. A conscientious person recognizes that any deliberate action is likely to set off a train of consequences, both intended and unintended, wanted and unwanted. The wider the scope of action and the deeper its reach, the more complex will be the array of consequences.

What are our responsibilities with respect to the total set of the consequences of our actions? That would take a book-length analysis to answer. But every conscientious person is aware of some basic responsibilities in the exercise of power. Assuming our intentions are permissible, we are obliged to pursue our aims with some degree of efficiency: we must avoid courses of action likely to undermine our intended aims. So we must be cognizant, not only of what we intend to achieve, but also of threats to that achievement from unintentional though foreseeable side-effects. We want to be careful that we do not set in motion foreseeable causal forces that undermine our

intended goals. But our duties go further than merely efficacy in achieving our aims; we must also consider foreseeable risks of unintended harms whose gravity outweighs the good we hope to achieve. Shooting everything that moves in a forest might be an efficient way to kill a deer, but in some circumstances such a method poses unacceptable risks to other human beings. So our concern with side-effects goes beyond our concern with efficacy in achieving our aims; we have an independent moral responsibility for avoiding certain foreseeable and harmful side-effects even when they do not hinder and might even promote our deliberate aims. A conscientious person, then, is concerned with the exercise of both his/her power and influence; indeed, one cannot exercise power responsibly without also seeking to control one's influence in the world.

Philosophers have rightly shown that the concepts of power and of influence are semantically and logically independent. Power is not an intentional kind of influence nor is influence necessarily a consequence of power. I can exert private mental powers that have no causal influence. But in practice, the more power I wield, the more influence I have, wanted or unwanted. Much of what we seek to do cannot be done without the cooperation of others, so human power is almost inescapably social. We are effective in accomplishing our aims to the extent that we can make use of, not only our own capacities, but also the capacities of others. Thus, because of the social dimension of power, someone with a large capacity for achieving his own aims also necessarily exercises broad and deep causal influence on others. Great power implies great influence, and a conscientious person worries not just about achieving her aims but also limiting her collateral damage. So even if power and influence are logically independent, in practice they are usually intertwined, meaning that when we exercise power, we must attempt to foresee the influence of our deeds.²

Even in deliberation about intimate relations within a family, we must worry about whether, for example, punishing a teenager will help or hurt. But in large-scale social, economic, and political arenas, the exercise of power will trigger cascades of unforeseen influences, often overwhelming the intended effects. Political philosophers and economists have long commented on the ways in which power is undermined by influence. For example, Aristotle argued that Plato's efforts to create social harmony by means of abolishing private property and the family would likely backfire, creating even more conflict. Thomas Aquinas famously cautioned that the attempt to use the law to suppress all vices, however well intentioned, would likely prove counter-productive and undermine respect for law in general. Indeed, the modern science of economics is centrally focused on the attempt to predict and explain the side-effects and by-products of deliberate human actions. Ever since John Locke argued that the attempt to limit interest rates by law would prove futile, economists have delighted in showing that deliberate attempts to control economic behavior by means of law, however well intentioned, will likely prove systematically futile or even counter-productive. But not all side-effects and by-products are to be regretted: Adam Smith argued that the 'invisible hand' of a competitive market turns the pursuit of our own self-interest into the unintended but beneficial by-products of productive efficiency and national prosperity. To the extent that the side-effects and by-products of our deliberate actions form patterns, they can be systematically studied. If the economists are right, social and political lives reflect the accumulated side-effects of human action more than deliberate decisions.

What this means is that if we seek to understand social and political relations of power, we must study both the intentions of the agents who exercise or resist power

and the side-effects or unintentional influence of those uses of power. Morriss and other philosophers may be right that the semantics of 'power' necessarily involve the notion of intention, while the side-effects of our decisions belong to the semantics of 'influence.' But social scientists and others who wish to illuminate relations of power will need to consider both what agents intend to do as well as what they unintentionally bring about: in philosophical terms, both the power of agents and their influence. But common parlance does not and will not observe such semantic niceties: we ascribe power to agents who have a broad capacity to bring about both intended and unintended effects.

2. Power in perspective

As we shall see, there are many different perspectives on power: externalist and internalist, first-person and second-person, agent and patient perspectives. I will argue that the best way to understand and overcome the bewildering profusion of power concepts is to attempt reflectively to view power from several different standpoints, some external and some internal to social relations of power. The many existing conceptualizations of power tacitly embody particular points of view about power: sometimes the point of view of external observers, sometimes the point of view of good or bad agents exercising power, sometimes the point of view of victims of power. If seemingly incompatible notions of power reflect different points of view, then we can show the extent to which these various notions are mutually compatible. Perhaps power is like the elephant described very differently by the five blind men, each of whom, from his own perspective, grasps only a part of the whole truth. Perhaps the profusion of notions of power merely reflects the profusion of possible perspectives from which to observe power.

Although I do believe that a full understanding of power requires consideration of more than one perspective, I will argue that not all perspectives on power are equally valuable or illuminating. The attempt to theorize power has much to learn from the attempt to theorize law. A recent and very illuminating approach to legal theory has stemmed from the method of distinguishing and then employing a variety of points of view about law. The scandal of so many incompatible definitions of power today closely resembles the scandalous profusion of traditional definitions of law. H.L.A. Hart (1961) began his influential book, *The Concept of Law*, by surveying some of the many diverse definitions of law. Several of these definitions were distinctly external and third-person, as when law is described as a kind of 'command' or 'coercive norm' or 'prophesies of what courts will do.' Lawyers do not think of most legal rules as commands; citizens rarely describe obeying the law as being coerced, and judges do not (and cannot logically) define law as whatever courts will do. In other words, these external or third-person definitions of law failed to capture the beliefs and attitudes of those who make, interpret, apply, or obey law. According to Hart: 'The external point of view of social rules is that of an observer of their practice, and the internal point of view is that of a participant in such practice who accepts the rules as guides to conduct and as standards of criticism.'³ From an external point of view, law looks merely like a system of behavioral regularities, but from the point of view of legal officials and citizens, law appears as a set of norms by which we judge our own conduct and the conduct of others. Hart argued that we can best understand and describe a legal system by beginning with the insider's point of view. How do lawyers, judges, and other legal officials think about law? Hart is careful to distinguish the descriptive aims of legal

theory from its normative aims. He argues that a theorist best understands a social institution by understanding the perspective of those who participate in it; the theorist need not, of course, endorse the practices he seeks to describe.⁴ Ever since Hart's seminal work, most legal theorists, both positivists and their critics, have focused their analysis of law in terms of the practical reasoning of legal officials and conscientious citizens.

John Finnis, for example, develops Hart's analysis by arguing that the most adequate description of law will be found in the practical reasoning, not of any legal official, but only of legal officials who are practically wise. Within perspectives internal to law, in other words, Finnis distinguishes the perspectives of good men from bad men. What Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., called the 'bad man' theory of law was the first-person perspective on law of a bad man or a bad lawyer, i.e., one for whom law is merely a set of obstacles to the pursuit of self-interest. The bad man looks at law as a set of constraints on others but not on himself; for a bad man, law is to be circumvented where it is inconvenient. Finnis argues, in contrast, that an adequate description of law would pay attention to those features of law emphasized by a good and conscientious lawyer who cares about why we need a legal system and is responsive to the moral claims of justice.⁵ Why privilege the perspective of the conscientious lawyers over the cynical and bad man? Because the wise lawyer's perspective includes and transcends that of the bad man: a wise lawyer understands why someone would selfishly want to evade the demands of law, but he also understands why law ought to be generally respected. In contrast, the bad man does not grasp or attend to the moral claims of justice. Moreover, Finnis says that we understand any artifact by grasping the purpose of those who made it or use it. Since, says Finnis, the legal order is made and used for the most part by good men, we understand what they have wrought by clarifying and refining their understanding (1980, p. 12).

Yet many political scientists and political theorists conceptualize power from the outside in terms unrelated to the concepts used by those who seek or wield power. Steven Lukes famously described Dahl's concept of power as 'one-dimensional,' but I think it is much more illuminating to describe it as a classic external perspective: 'A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do.'⁶ Although Dahl's definition is cited and discussed on myriad occasions, no one, to my knowledge, has expressed concern that his definition applies as much to the 'power' a hurricane has over a tree or a magnet has over metal filings as to any kind of social power. Indeed, Dahl admits that his definition of a relation of power amounts to no more than a causal relation: 'For the assertion "C has power over B," one can substitute the assertion, "C's behavior causes B's behavior".'⁷ And indeed, from such an external perspective, power relations do appear to be nothing more than correlations of conduct from which causation may or may not be inferred. According to this definition, I have power over you if I inadvertently provoke you to kill me: thus, Japan exercised power over the United States when Americans dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Nelson Polsby's attempt to equate power with influence is another variant on this externalist definition of power in terms of brute causation: 'the power of one actor to do something affecting another actor.'⁸ But this externalist definition creates the same absurdities as does Dahl's: I have power over you because I unintentionally provoked you to frustrate all of my desires. We are now in a position to see that Steven Lukes' celebrated definition of three-dimensional power is just as external as that of the behavioralists: 'A may exercise power over B by getting him to do what

he does not want to do, but he also exercises power over him by influencing, shaping or determining his very wants.⁹ Lukes' notion of causation runs deeper than Dahl's, since it affects not only the behavior but also the beliefs and desires of persons, but Lukes shares Dahl's view that power is basically a causal relation.¹⁰ According to Lukes' definition, I exercise power over you by inadvertently causing you to want to kill me. The only way to avoid the absurdities of these externalist perspectives on power is to define power in relation to the subjective intentions of agents. Thus, Max Weber defined power in terms of achieving one's goals, and Bertrand Russell defined power as 'the capacity of some persons to produce intended and foreseen effects in others.'¹¹ Analysis of power in terms of causal influence is obviously an external perspective on power, since inanimate objects exercise causal influence; analysis of power in terms of the intentions of the agents is obviously an internal perspective on power, since we grasp intentions by assuming the internal perspective of an intelligent agent.

One tradition of reflection upon power does make reference to the subjective goals of the agent, but understands these goals in a very cynical and restricted way. In this cynical view, human conduct is often attributed to a distinctively human 'will to power,' meaning, in this context, a will to dominate, control, and subordinate others. This alleged quest for 'power after power,' to use Hobbes' phrase, is sometimes described as rational in the instrumental sense that whatever ultimate goals a person or statesman might have, he needs power first in order to attain them. But sometimes, observers (ranging from Machiavelli to Nietzsche) contend that other people seek power purely for its own sake, i.e., simply for the pleasure of dominating and controlling others. No matter how pervasive one might regard this love of lording it over others, it is a merely derivative, if not pathological, kind of power; and such derivative or pathological forms of conduct are certainly not the best guide for understanding human affairs more broadly. A conscientious agent understands the temptations of a will-to-power, but he also understands the more comprehensive aims of the exercise of power. So the conscientious perspective includes but transcends the narrow will-to-power.

Legal theorists continue to argue about what beliefs and attitudes are necessary for conscientious legal officials and citizens, but analysis of law now generally attempts to track the beliefs and attitudes of those who make, interpret, obey, and enforce law. I think the analysis of power would benefit from adopting a procedure that has been so fruitful in legal theory. We need to consider how good and conscientious people think about their own exercise of power. What do they mean by power? What role does power play in their practical reasoning? What are the morally salient aspects of power? How does power relate to justice?

3. Power-to and power-over

Many social scientists and theorists have come to distinguish 'power-over' (someone) from 'power-to' (do something). Some champion 'power-over,' while others, champion 'power-to.' But these are not simply two independent senses of power or two equally plausible definitions of power. I will argue that both of these senses of power implicitly appeal to the internal perspective of an agent. To attempt to exercise 'power-over' someone is intelligible either as a mere means to the ultimate end of exercising 'power-to' do something or as an end in itself. In both cases, we are concerned here with the internal perspective of a bad person who either seeks to

manipulate others as a mere means to his end or who seeks the sheer enjoyment of domination. As good and conscientious agents, in contrast, we deliberate about what we want to accomplish and we think of power mainly in terms of our capacity to achieve our goals. A deep analysis of the family of concepts associated with power shows that a good person's focus on power-to do things is logically fundamental and that the notion of power-over has only a tenuous relation to the actual meaning of power. We should not be surprised that the true logic and semantics of power reflect the normal deliberations of a good person rather than the perverse deliberations of someone seeking to dominate others. Just as 'power-to' is logically prior to 'power-over,' so is the internal perspective of a good person logically prior to the internal perspective of a bad person.

The first thing to notice about power is that it is a dispositional concept, meaning that power is in principle unobservable and can be studied only indirectly. 'So power, as a dispositional concept, is neither a *thing* (a resource or vehicle) nor an *event* (an exercise of power): it is a *capacity*' (Morris 1987, p. 19, emphasis in original; cf. Kenny 1975, 1989).¹² Therefore, the power of a particular knife to cut or of a particular person to speak must be inferred from what we know about the observable features of that particular knife or person and what we know about the class of knives and persons. Power, like all dispositional concepts, is a theoretical construct. Many modern philosophers, suspicious of what they regard as hidden or occult properties, have attempted to reduce power to either its resources or vehicle (Hobbes and Descartes) or to its exercise (Hume and Dahl).¹³ Human power is a dispositional ability that cannot be reduced to any episode of its exercise. This is evident when we judge that we or someone else can do something even if we or they are not now doing it. So ability to do does not imply actual doing. Does actually doing something imply an ability to do it? If I see someone doing something does it follow that he or she is able to do it? No, I can hit a bull's eye accidentally without the ability to hit a bull's eye, and I can ape a foreign language without being able to speak it (Kenny 1975, p. 126). The logical point is that no single episode of performance can establish a dispositional ability.

In ethics and politics, we are interested in power mainly as ability. An ability is a capacity to do something when we want to do it. 'Natural powers may be exercised without intention, but not abilities' (Morris 1987, p. 28). Since power is an ability, then 'Sam has power' is an incomplete sentence just like 'Sam can' (Wagner 1969, p. 4). No mortal has generic ability or power, just specific abilities and specific powers. It is crucial to grasp the logical and semantic differences between power as an ability and influence as a cause. Unfortunately, ever since Lasswell (1936, p. 3), most political theorists and political scientists treat power and influence as synonymous. But Morris rightly observes that we do not say that someone has influence but does not bother to influence anyone, while we do say that someone has power but does not bother to use it (Morris 1987, p. 24). To influence something or someone is to causally affect it, but to exercise power is to effect something in the sense of accomplishing it. Consider Morris's example, "a single glass of brandy may affect [i.e. alter for better or worse the prospects of] his recovery" is very different from "a single glass of brandy may effect [i.e. bring about] his recovery" (1987, p. 29).¹⁴ Morris shows that one can affect something without in any way effecting it. Even when we talk about other people's power, we usually mean power-to do something, not power-over someone. We say that Congress has power to declare war, not power over the President. Again, we speak of power-over in unusual and morally suspect situations, such as the power of a blackmailer over his victim. Except *in extremis*, obeying the law is not like

submitting to the demands of a mugger, just as exercising power is not like blackmailing someone.

To make these derivative and corrupt examples of power into the central focus of political science is bound to have bad political consequences. Morriss cites the example of the 'Black Power' movement: the founders of this movement emphasized the empowerment of blacks to manage their own affairs, but whites often misinterpreted it as a demand for black power-over whites, i.e., for black domination (Morriss 1987, pp. 33–34). We might generalize Morriss' observation to any movement for empowerment: women or gays who seek the ability to do things are often accused of seeking power-over others. No better examples could be offered of the danger of choosing a very derivative meaning as one's focal sense of power and the danger of framing one's analysis of power in terms of the deliberation of a bad person.

The confusion of power-over with power-to accounts for much sloppy thinking in the social and human sciences. Dennis Wrong (1979, pp. 219–220), for example, points out that when we say that everyone wants power, we could mean the trivial truth that everyone wants the capacity to achieve his or her goals, or we could mean the dark but false claim that everyone wants to dominate others. The truth of the first claim is wrongly thought to support the second claim. That everyone wants power to be effective in no way implies that everyone wants to dominate others. Similarly, says Wrong, inequalities of power in terms of capacity are often assumed to reflect inequalities of power in the sense of domination and oppression. From the fact that we see a huge range of capacities in any society, it does not follow that this inequality of capacities reflects any exercise of domination or oppression. True, the range of inequalities of social power (as measured by money, status, or influence) vastly exceeds the range of inequalities of natural powers, meaning that social inequalities of power reflect more than natural inequalities of power. But the fact that social inequalities of power largely reflect the workings of social institutions does not mean that social inequalities stem from the deliberate exercise of power to dominate.

4. A fresh start: use of my capacities versus use of another's capacities

A growing number of philosophers and social theorists are now beginning to concede that power-over is 'parasitic on' (Isaac 1992) or a 'special case' (Wrong 1979) of the more basic concept of power-to. It is now widely recognized that the notion of 'power-to' is logically and semantically prior to the notion of 'power-over.' But this claim is more often asserted than demonstrated. How do we show that power-over is derivative while power-to is basic? After all, power-over captures a social dimension of power lacking in the notion of power-to. Can we analyze the social dimension of power in terms other than power-over? I shall outline an approach toward understanding the social dimension of power in terms that avoid the morally bad connotations of seeking 'power-over' other people. In short, how does a good person deliberate about the social dimension of his or her own power?

We need a more fundamental distinction than power-to and power-over in order to locate the most ethically and politically salient exercises of power. Beginning with our basic notion of power as ability, we can then distinguish abilities that I exercise using my own capacities from abilities that I exercise using my own and others' capacities. The notion of power-over is just a vague and metaphoric description of what it means to make use of another person's capacities to accomplish some goal. So my ability to run makes use only of my own capacities, but my ability to feed myself depends upon

my ability to make use of the capacities of farmers to grow food and of retailers to sell it. My ability to learn may make use only of my own capacities, but my ability to teach makes use of the capacities of my students to learn, just as my ability to procreate makes use of the reproductive capacities of my wife. As these examples show, even the mere use of our own capacities in certain cases may be ethically problematic, but the use of other's capacities to effect our goals is always morally and politically significant. Because we rarely value another person's capacities as much as we do our own, we are all quite prone wrongly to subordinate their capacities to our own goals.

We can make use of other people's capacities in many different ways, all of them fraught with moral danger: for example, by agreement (including market exchange), by fraud, by mistake, or by coercion.¹⁵ When we worry about the exercise of power over others, what really concerns us is the wrongful subordination of the capacities of one person by another. These worries are pervasive because the exercise of most of our abilities depends upon the enlisting of the capacities of other persons. Kant recognized the moral hazards of our unavoidable need to make use of the capacities of others when he formulated the categorical imperative that we never use other people as a means only but always also as an end. People in positions of authority are precisely those who are permitted to make the widest use of the capacities of others in pursuit of legitimate goals. The president of the United States, in conjunction with Congress, can enlist the capacities of millions of men and women in pursuit of national defense. The more authority we possess, the greater is our temptation to wrongly use the capacities of others and the greater is our responsibility not to do so. What matters about the use of the capacities of others is not just how extensive it is but also how intensive it is, i.e., how significant are the capacities we use to the self-conception of the other person. To sell someone something enlists some of their capacities, but it is not as significant as enlisting their capacity for reproduction or enlisting their capacity for religious belief. When we seek to make use of the core capacities of a person, we are especially at risk for wrongful subordination and abuse.

The will-to-power is only one possible source of our general tendency to wrongly subordinate other people to our own purposes. Much more often, our focus on our own goals simply eclipses our attention to the rights of those with whom we must cooperate. Yet, although our use of other people's capacities is no doubt morally fraught, we must not conclude that it is intrinsically wrong. I cannot accomplish much in the way of either good or evil without enlisting the capacities of others. Yet Macpherson, who usefully distinguishes the use of one's own capacities from the use of others' capacities, resorts to persuasive definition in describing the first as 'developmental' and the second as 'extractive' (Macpherson 1973, p. 40). But this assumes that we use the capacities of others only for the purpose of exploitation, rather than, say, performing a duet. We would not get far in our self-development without making extensive use of the capacities of others. One shortcoming of the expression 'power-over' is that it denigrates the exercise of power, which is why many theorists use it to mean unwarranted domination. But the language we use to describe making use of the capacities of others ranges widely in evaluative tone: marry, love, inspire, cooperate, join, play with, persuade, exchange, compete, control, command, dominate, coerce, force, etc. Social life immensely expands our abilities because of these ways to enlist the abilities of others in achieving the good and bad things we could not achieve alone.¹⁶

How do we learn to make use of other's capacities? First, we must learn how to make good use of our own capacities. If we misuse our own capacities through vice and self-destruction, we cannot make good use of others' capacities. If we become

addicted to drugs, alcohol, gambling, or pornography, then we will be able to enlist the capacities of others only by deceit, manipulation, and domination. In other words, if we cannot freely enlist our own rational and affective capacities to accomplish our goals because we are enslaved to our desires, then we will not be able to freely enlist the capacities of others. If the only way that we can control our own desires is by self-command, then our relations to others will also be in the imperative mood. But if we learn to persuade ourselves to overcome our phobias, weakness of will, and other neuroses, then we will learn how to persuade others.

Second, we learn how to make use of others' capacities by first experiencing how others make use of our capacities. Aristotle famously argued that in order to rule well we must first learn how to be ruled. Rising through the ranks in the Army may be the best illustration of this principle. Learning to obey, cooperate, and assist others is a very active process: to obey someone well requires that we understand the point of the command and not merely the words, so that we can accomplish the aim of the commander in new and creative ways. We learn to distinguish commands with a rational purpose from commands that reflect the arbitrary will of the commander – commands we naturally resent. By understanding obedience and by realizing how much we resent sheer conformity to another's will, we then learn how to exercise power responsibly.

To exercise power responsibly, we must ask ourselves if our desire to enlist the capacities of others serves the good of those others or merely our own ego gratification. It is one thing to insist that one's children wear warm clothing in winter, but quite another to insist that they wear matching outfits. Yet what a huge part of family conflict stems from confusing these two kinds of power! In the heated moment of command, it is often quite difficult to distinguish rational necessity from arbitrary fiat. We are all sorely tempted to force others to conform to our arbitrary preferences, thus losing sight of the rational purpose of relations of power. When dealing with adults, we generally want our commands not only to be in the interest of those commanded but also to be understood as in their interest. Thus Plato, in his *Laws*, argues that doctors who merely prescribe remedies without explaining why, are treating their patients like slaves; he compares these doctors to legislators whose enacted commands that lack a preamble explaining the rational point of the law. When we enlist the capacities of other adults, we almost always ought to enlist their capacity for understanding.

We cannot hope to address here the complex ethical considerations of paternalism, authority, legitimacy, consent, and autonomy, but at the most general level, those who wield power should consider some range of strategies for eliciting cooperation from others. Since there are many different ways to make use of the capacities of others, the responsible use of power requires us to use the least coercive kind of power feasible. The myriad differing contexts of life rule out any universal protocol governing the exercise of power. Still, conscientious people think in roughly these terms: ask before you take, trade before you commandeer, negotiate before you command, command before you coerce.

5. The power of custom

The literature on power is replete with discussion of collective forms of power: gender power, class power, race power, disciplinary power, knowledge power, and others. Many of these notions of collective power rest upon the concept of power-over: since men or whites are said to have more 'power' than women and blacks, then those

whites or men must be exercising power-over women and blacks. But we can see that this kind of reasoning fails by equivocation: if whites or men have more power in the sense of abilities, then it does not follow that this must reflect their power-over others, since abilities are essentially non-competitive.¹⁷ If the greater power of one group must come at the expense of other groups, then we are dealing with power-over, not with power-to. It is for this reason that those who emphasize the empowerment of women, or blacks, or the poor should not be interpreted to assert that empowerment leads to greater power-over men, whites, or the rich. Disparity or equality of abilities implies nothing about relations of power-over. As Morris observes, being powerless does not always mean being in someone's power (1987, p. 41), just as being powerful does not always imply having power-over someone.

As we shall see, many confusions about the alleged exercise of collective forms of power stem from the failure to adopt a perspective internal to a person exercising power. Once we see that only intentional agents (including both natural and artificial persons) can exercise power, then we shall dissolve misleading notions of class, gender, and cultural power. In many cases, the very nature of the social conventions defining class, gender, and culture makes them highly resistant to the efforts of individuals or groups to wield them intentionally. Yes, social custom is powerful in the sense of influential, but custom cannot be intentionally deployed as a form of power-to or as power-over. In short, class, gender, and national customs are deeply influential but essentially powerless.

The ancient poet Pindar famously wrote that 'custom is king' (*nomos basileus*). According to Michel Foucault, Steven Lukes, and many others, the most profound and insidious kind of power is what J.S. Mill called the 'tyranny of custom.' By invisibly shaping our beliefs and attitudes, custom dominates and controls us from the inside, so to speak. What more far-reaching power is possible than the power to shape our basic beliefs and values? Since customary beliefs and attitudes often seem to favor some groups more than others, it is tempting to see custom as a vehicle for the exercise of power-over. Indeed, the broad cultural norms that lead the poor, the black, or women to false beliefs about their own abilities are oppressive. And since the rich, white, or men may well benefit from these false beliefs, it seems plausible to infer that at least some customary beliefs and attitudes themselves are instruments designed and wielded by some groups to gain power over others.

Custom may well be the source of appalling oppression, in the sense of profoundly disabling beliefs and values, but custom is also deeply resistant to being used as an instrument of power politics. Because customs are the by-product of human social conduct, but not the design of anyone, they are largely incapable of being deliberately designed or even deliberately wielded by anyone. The efforts of linguistic academies to alter customary speech are good examples of the futility of attempting directly to change customs. The fact that various customs advantage some groups and not others does not prove that custom is a weapon of the powerful: it might be merely serendipitous, or there may be a natural proclivity of lower-status animals to imitate the mores of higher-status animals – especially the human animal. We do not know much about the psychological and social mechanisms that give rise to customs, but we do know that they are not the product of deliberate design and imposition. Turning to the psychological mechanisms of belief formation, most philosophers claim that our beliefs are not subject to our own direct control, which makes it even less likely that someone else could deliberately and directly control our beliefs.¹⁸ Customary beliefs, like all customs, are deeply resistant to sudden change.

We ascribe custom to one group's exercise of power over another because we want to identify whom to blame for customs that we find execrable. But a set of social customs or social conventions might well be oppressive without there being any oppressors; they might be oppressive simply because they are archaic. True, some members of some groups can be blamed for contributing to the persistence of oppressive racial or gender customs if they explicitly encourage a noxious set of beliefs and attitudes (Morriss 1987, p. 96). We should be wary of notions of group power because of the problem of collective action: the larger a group, the less likely it is to act in concert because of free-riding; the larger the group, the less power it can exercise (1987, p. 112). A diffuse group, such as men, has no capacity to act as a group. When we say that men are more powerful than women, what we usually mean is that a typical individual man is more powerful than a typical individual woman (1987, p. 112).

Some feminists, describing the beliefs and practices that some women associate with femininity (from shaving, make-up, and elaborate clothes to plastic surgery), describe these as reflecting some kind of exercise of power. Some describe it as a power women exercise over themselves, a kind of Foucaultian disciplinary power, and some as a power that men exercise over women, or both kinds of power (Allen 2005). But even if we assume that these practices of femininity are damaging to the interests of women, it does not follow that they reflect any power exercised by men. It is curious that these feminists do not comment on the vast range of destructive male behavior intended to please women. Shall we assume that the mayhem caused by machismo reflects the exercise of women's power over men?

Perhaps most men and women are by nature attracted to the opposite sex and thus have a partly innate, partly learned propensity to try to please the opposite sex. This simple proclivity could account for all the many oppressive practices of femininity and masculinity, without any role for one sex exercising power over another. True, the content of what counts as feminine or masculine is shaped by local customs, and these customs can be indirectly influenced by some members of either sex, but there are psychological studies purporting to show that the body image that women think is attractive to men is not actually preferred by men and the body image that men think is attractive to women is not actually preferred by women.¹⁹ This kind of evidence suggests that neither sex is effectively exercising power over the other, and that each sex is motivated by its own desire to please. So we are all oppressed by our own sexual attractions and desires to please, which is why *Eros* is thought to be so, well, powerful.

Because we use the language of power mainly to locate responsibility and blame, we define social and political power in terms of deliberate abilities. The fact that I might exercise substantial influence over another person by my natural charisma or (more plausibly) by my pheromones does not mean that I exercise power, because I may not be at all aware of the influence I have. In social and political life, we are mainly interested in abilities, because abilities are exercised at will and we are directly responsible for what we intentionally choose. But conscientious agents are also interested in the unintended influence they exert: so to the extent that I am aware of my influence, I become indirectly responsible for it. That each sex exercises considerable influence over the other by virtue of its natural powers does not imply that either sex has power over the other. Only agents who can form and exercise a will are capable of exercising power. No doubt some men, such as those in the Taliban, attempt to exercise power over women, as do those men who support legislation restricting the rights of women, but men as a group are literally not able to exercise power because they are not able to form a collective will-to-power. In addition to natural persons,

corporate persons of various kinds, from a business to the Congress, have organs for forming and expressing their will. But informal social groups, such as men, whites, or the rich, are neither natural nor corporate persons; they lack any organ for forming or expressing a will, so they cannot be said to exercise power.

What are we then to make of the notion of 'soft power'? According to Joseph Nye (2004), the United States possesses vast reservoirs of soft power in the form of the influence exerted over the entire globe by perceptions of American culture, values, customs, diplomacy, and institutions. And, no doubt, the diffusion of American culture powerfully shapes customs and cultures everywhere in the world. But is this undeniable cultural influence a form of power? Here, we see the immense chasm between the concepts of influence and power, even though many theorists continue to treat them as synonyms. Power is a capacity which can be deliberately deployed to achieve our goals. The diffusion of American culture is immensely influential but can it be harnessed to promote any actual American goals? Nye concedes that compared with 'hard' power, 'soft power is more difficult to wield' (2004, p. 99). The cultural resources of American society are not controlled by our government, so they are very difficult to mobilize for any specific objectives. Indeed, the act of deploying cultural resources for political ends is called propaganda. And although it is true that the United States and other countries devote considerable resources to various kinds of political and cultural propaganda, it is not known whether it is at all effective.

Indeed, there is something inherently self-defeating about the idea of 'wielding' soft power: once a cultural or political message is perceived to be an instrument of politics, it loses its persuasive force and often backfires. As Nye says, 'Propaganda often lacks credibility and thus is counterproductive' (2004, p. 107). Nye proceeds to admit that unilateral broadcasting or public preaching will win few converts abroad. He argues that 'exchanges are often more effective than mere broadcasting' (2004, p. 111). But to the extent that soft power relies upon dialogue and exchange, it loses its power. Genuine dialogue and exchange are inherently open-ended and thus cannot be 'wielded' to serve any specific political goal; dialogue and exchange may well extend American influence, but they cannot be made to serve any particular political goals. Nye says that cultural soft power rests upon American attractiveness with foreigners (2004, pp. 11–18). But how attractive is attractiveness deployed for an ulterior motive? Without a hint of irony, Nye writes 'exerting attraction on others often does allow you to get what you want' (2004, p. 15). True, all kinds of salesmanship and propaganda are attempts to 'exert attraction', but Nye concedes that propaganda often backfires. To attempt to wield or deploy our cultural resources would undermine their attractiveness. Moreover, as Nye's data show, only a minority of foreigners claim to find our cultural exports attractive (2004, p. 69–72). Indeed, it should be no surprise after 9/11 that the export of our culture abroad creates as many enemies as friends. American culture is very influential but not at all powerful.

6. Conclusion

We have encountered several different contrasting ways to describe power: power as ability and power as influence, power-to and power-over, hard power and soft power. Each of these contrasts seems at first to challenge the coherence of any notion of power. But once we learn to distinguish internal from external perspectives on power as well as to distinguish the internal perspective of a good and conscientious person from the internal perspective of someone aiming at mere domination, then we can

make sense of these contrasts. Power has a unity in the deliberations of a good person aiming to accomplish his or her goals by recruiting the capacities of other people. We saw that the semantics of power as ability is independent of the semantics of power as influence. Yet we distinguish in order to unite: in the deliberations of every agent, especially of statesmen, we must consider both our abilities and our influence. Because we are morally responsible, though in different ways, for both the intended and the unintended consequences of our actions, we must reflect upon both our power and our influence. Philosophers have shown that the notion of power as ability is more basic than the notion of power as influence. Why? Because we are (usually) morally responsible in a more direct way for our intended aims than for the unintended consequences of our actions. So by taking up the internal perspective of a conscientious agent, we see not only the close relation of power as ability to power as influence, but also why power is most fundamentally concerned with our abilities to do what we intend to do. And because conscientious statesmen are concerned with both the intended and the unintended consequences of their actions, so political science must be concerned with power and with influence.

We saw that many theorists distinguish 'power-to' from 'power-over'. Both of these notions of power stem from the internal perspective of agents: good and conscientious agents focus on their power to realize their goals, while bad agents focus on their power to dominate others. Many theorists also argue that the notion of 'power-over' is logically derivative or parasitic on the notion of 'power-to'. Why? Because the internal perspective of a good and conscientious agent includes and transcends the perspective of a bad person. The notion of 'power-over' is a poor attempt to capture the social dimension of most exercises of 'power-to'. That is why I distinguish instead between the power to use my own capacities and the power to use the capacities of others. Almost every exercise of power involves the use of my own capacities as well as the capacities of others. This distinction captures the almost inevitably social nature of power, while avoiding any dubious connotations of domination.

Finally, many writers argue that power can be exercised by various collectivities, such as genders, classes, or races. But once we see that these collectivities are defined, not by any formal organization but only by shared customs, and that customs by their nature resist being manipulated for specific purposes, then we discover that social customs defining gender, class, and race have great influence but are not sources of power. Only persons, both natural and artificial, can form purposes and then exercise power to accomplish them. We saw that Joseph Nye distinguishes the 'hard' power of weapons and resources that can be wielded by a statesman from the 'soft' or cultural power allegedly at the disposal of a nation. Here, we found that only 'hard' power is truly powerful and that 'soft' power amounts to mere influence. Once we understand the customary basis of 'soft' power, then we see why it cannot be wielded deliberately to pursue our goals. If Nye had focused upon the internal perspective of statesmen, then he would have seen that they can easily deliberate on how to wield 'hard' power to accomplish their goals, but that they cannot deliberate coherently on how to wield 'soft' power, because soft power resists being wielded at all.

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Notes

1. 'Politics: Broadly, the ways in which people gain, use, and lose *power*' (Calhoun 2002, emphasis in original).
2. Michelle Clarke rightly points out that in the course of exercising various powers, role models also inevitably exercise a great deal of influence, intentional or not. Thus, in a practical sense, a person's 'power' includes both his abilities and the range of his influence.
3. Hart (1994, p. 255).
4. 'It is true that for this purpose the descriptive legal theorist must *understand* what it is to adopt the internal point of view and in that limited sense he must be able to put himself in the place of an insider; but this is not to accept the law or share or endorse the insider's internal point of view' Hart (1994, p. 242, emphasis in original).
5. Finnis describes practically reasonable persons as 'consistent; attentive to all aspects of human opportunity and flourishing, and aware of their limited commensurability; concerned to remedy deficiencies and breakdowns, and aware of their roots in the various aspects of human personality and in the economic and other material conditions of social interaction.' (1980, p. 15).
6. Dahl (1957) quoted in Lukes (2005, p. 16).
7. 'The closest equivalent to the power relation is the causal relation.' Dahl (1986, p. 46).
8. Polsby (1963) quoted in Lukes (2005, pp. 17–18).
9. Lukes (2005, p. 27).
10. 'The absolutely basic common core to, or primitive notion lying behind, all talk of power is the notion that A in some way affects B' Lukes, (2005, p. 30). Lukes revised his analysis of power from affects to effects in his 2005 revision of this 1975 book; see Lukes (2005, pp. 63–65).
11. For Weber, see Lukes 1986, p. 39. For Russell, see Wrong 1995, p. x.
12. Following Ryle (1950), Morriss describes a class of dispositional concepts which include capacities. Kenny (1989, p. 84), however, distinguishes capacities (such as power) from dispositions proper; he describes a disposition as halfway between a capacity and an action. Ayers (1968, Chap. 6) also argues that personal powers are capacities but not dispositions.
13. Hobbes, who denied the distinction between potentiality and actuality, reduces power to resources: 'The power of a Man (to take it Universally) is his present means, to obtain some future apparent Good.' (Lev. Chap. 10). For a penetrating criticism of these and other kinds of reductionism, see Ayers (1968, pp. 60–68) and Kenny (1975, pp. 10–11 and 124–125).
14. 'Hence, you can affect, but not effect, a person; and you can effect, but not affect, a state of affairs that does not now exist.' Morriss (1987, pp. 29–30).
15. Peter Morriss rightly points out that this list is far from exhaustive; he usefully adds 'by competition.'
16. I do not mean to deny that social life also has a rich array of intrinsic and common goods.
17. Abilities are not competitive but ableness sometimes is, because opportunities might be scarce.
18. Of course, a powerful group could create a social and political environment in which the formation of certain beliefs is likely, as with an established church or communist regime. So there are indirect ways to shape customary belief.
19. See Bergstrom *et al.* (2004) and Fallon and Rozin (1985).

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