

The Grammars of 'Power': Between Contestation and Mediation¹

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Introduction

The grammar of power is often the *locus in quo* for theoretical manipulation of, and contestation over, ordinary language. Political theorists frequently commence or frame their inquiries into the phenomena of power by offering technical definitions of 'power' as such, or by stipulating grammatical strictures that place artificial a priori constraints on the ways in which it makes sense to speak about power. For reasons that are rooted in the 'radical empiricism' of philosophical pragmatism, I wish to offer in the following essay an extended critique of the theoretical urge to depart systematically from the ordinary, open-textured grammar of 'power'.

Without attempting to ape their prose styles, I begin by employing a basic method that was central to the philosophical writings of the mature Ludwig Wittgenstein and J. L. Austin. In section one, I catalogue various grammatical constructions of 'power', contrasting the richness of common parlance with the narrower strictures of certain political theories. Section two suggests a general philosophical diagnosis of these artificial grammatical strictures; it offers a preliminary sketch of how various grammatical aspects of power can be integrated in context-specific interpretations of political phenomena; and it defends the possibility of distinguishing between ethically acceptable and unacceptable ways of distributing, organizing, and exercising power. Naturally, I cannot deduce but can only invoke and elicit ordinary intuitions about 'power', including the intuition that it makes sense to talk about power as something open to critical appraisal. When possible, here and throughout the essay, I offer vernacular qualifications and translations of insights that are misleadingly embedded within artificial grammatical constructions. I then apply basic methods of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 1995) and analytic philosophy (broadly speaking) to the theoretical discourse of power.

Section three introduces the thesis that the concept of 'power' is 'essentially contestable', and indicates one meta-ethical sense in which this thesis may be defensible. I then add another, more convincing reason for accepting the essential contestability of 'power'. In short, it is an enduring condition of power-language that no one has the power to place 'power', by linguistic fiat, beyond the reach of the power of others. Section four critically examines William Connolly's (1983) account of theoretical discourse as divided between two ideologically opposing grammatical paradigms. In my view, 'power' is essentially contestable, not because it is regularly employed in divergent ways by entrenched ideological camps, but because ideologically diverse speakers often feel compelled, for various purposes, to assert their own idiosyncratic mastery over the concept. In section five, from the standpoint of analytic speech pragmatics and John Pocock's (1984) theory of power-language, I critically examine the false assumptions about communication that underwrite the view that the ordinary grammar of 'power' is in need of theoretical revision. I then examine two different kinds of critical reaction (Norton 2005 and Flyvbjerg 1998) to the exceedingly narrow forms of institutional rationality that artificially constructed and putatively operational languages tend to facilitate (usually to the advantage of powerful interests). Section six indicates the kind of conceptual mediation that ordinary power-language makes possible, and distinguishes the available pragmatic grounds for embracing this approach to power from the purely formal ideal of Habermas' (1990) discourse ethic. The ordinary grammar of 'power' is then defended against worries that it is too vague to be useful and too mundane to be interesting.

Theoretical Grammars of Power: An Overview

We ordinarily speak of power as something that agents, individually and collectively, can generate, muster up, possess, and exercise. In theoretical discourse, however, this common grammar is often contested on grounds that it fails to capture, or even masks, the real nature of power. For example, according to Hannah Arendt, who maintains that power is a collective capacity for concerted action, we can never speak literally of the power generated by or possessed by an individual, but at most of the power he or she exercises on behalf of the collectivity from which it springs, and to which it necessarily belongs (1969: 44). One step further removed from ordinary language, Michel Foucault

insists, first, that we speak neither of individual nor of collective possession of power, but only of the exercise of power through or by way of subjects who lack the capacity to appropriate it as a value for themselves; and second, that we ask not how individuals and identifiable groups of individuals generate power, but rather how they are themselves generated by power (1972: 98).

We also ordinarily say that A comes into or is *in power*, that A has or exercises the *power to* \emptyset (or, in the same sense, that an action, \emptyset , is within or beyond the power of A), that in \emptyset -ing A has or exercises *power over* B, and that A wields or sets his *power against* B or B's interests. But these locutions rarely enjoy equal status under the rules of representation laid down in political theories of power.

For example, from the point of view of individualized action theory, Hobbes (1991), Bertrand Russell (1938), Alvin Goldman (1972), Felix Oppenheim (1981), and others construe power as, at bottom, a simple capacity-concept (*power to*) for designating an isolated agent's ability to produce intended, desired or beneficial effects. Political events, stability or change in different social relations, and the structure and direction of evolving social systems are then ultimately understood in terms of the interactions and aggregated effects of individual powers. The causal efficacy of action depends, of course, upon many things. It may depend upon the consent of others, it may come from the barrel of a gun, and so on. Power in this sense is not itself a particular kind of resource, but 'what resources of diverse kinds have in common' (Hindess 1996: 138).

Other theorists of power, such as Max Weber (1978), Georg Simmel (1950), Herbert Marcuse (1964), Robert Dahl (1957 & 1961), Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz (1970), Steven Lukes (1974a & 2005), and William Connolly (1983), reject the agent-centred approach of individualized action theory, and instead apply the word 'power' fundamentally to those who gain the superior position in relations of overt or suppressed conflict. These conflict theorists deny that it makes sense to speak of the power of individual or collective agents considered in isolation from the other individual or collective agents with whom they interact. Power in the relational sense applies only where there is both conflict and inequality between interacting subjects.

To begin with a seminal example of conflict theory, Weber conceives of power as one individual or collective agent's ability (measured as a statistical probability) to overcome resistance from other agents in the process of conforming them, or some other feature of

the world, to her will (Weber 1978: 53 & 926). In Weber's sense, power is necessarily *power over* others, though it is not necessarily wielded *against* them because it may be exercised to affect favourably, as well as adversely, their real interests or their eventual capacity for freedom. Other conflict theorists only see power relations where interests fundamentally collide. There are, for example, neo-Weberian conflict theorists, such as Dahl, who restrict the relational concept of power so that it always comprehends only conflicts of revealed preferences. Under this constraint, power is conceived as something that is necessarily wielded *against* those *over* whom it is exercised. Bachrach-Baratz and Lukes present two additional ways in which *power over* may be conceived as essentially *power against*. As Lukes explains, 'alternative interpretations and applications of one and the same underlying concept of power, according to which A affects B in a manner contrary to B's interests', vary with the different ways in which B's interests may be adversely affected: first, in open conflict between publicly revealed preferences (Dahl's criterion); secondly, as a result of A's ability to set the public agenda in such a way as to deny B the opportunity of open conflict (Bachrach-Baratz's additional criterion); and thirdly, in virtue of A's capacity to shape B's very preferences, so that B does not desire the kind of open conflict that would at least give her *real interests* a chance (Lukes' additional counterfactual criterion).

From a systems-theoretic perspective, some thinkers repudiate both the agent-centred and relational conceptions of power. For example, in his functional analysis of social systems, Talcott Parsons (1963) supposes that power is a distributable and 'combinatorial' symbolic resource, functionally analogous in political systems to the money that circulates through economic systems. The fundamental case for the application of his concept of power is a social system's *power to* achieve collective goals. In derivative cases, in light of some understanding of the overall function of a total system of social power, we can then form a conception of its internal organization as a symbolic medium that renders powerful (*in power*) those who come to occupy significant subject positions. Every other way of ascribing power to an individual or subgroup (*power to, power over, power over/against*) is therefore parasitic upon a more basic understanding of the subject's position and corresponding distributive share of power.

More recently, Clarissa Rile Hayward has offered a more radically revisionist systems-theoretic argument for conceiving of power

‘not as instruments powerful agents use to prevent the powerless from acting independently or authentically, but as social boundaries (such as laws, rules, norms, institutional arrangements, and social identities and exclusions) that constrain and enable action for all actors’ (2000: 12). Since all action within social systems is shaped by power-boundaries, there is no such thing as action that is free (in the negative sense) from power. We therefore cannot truly distinguish between the ‘powerful’ and the ‘powerless’ in social relations. Systems of power, of course, create asymmetries between different actors’ capacities to alter their ‘constitutive boundaries’. But any theoretical grammar that focuses fundamentally on *A’s power to* will fail to place that share of social power in its proper systematic context, and any grammar that focuses on *A’s power over B* will tend to draw our attention only towards the most obvious asymmetries in shares of social power (2000: 30-5).

A Plea for Ordinary Language

The above revisions of the ordinary, open-textured grammar of ‘power’ are either purely a priori revisionist injunctions or, at best, exaggerations of important truths. In their best light, they appear, against the complex background of social reality, as attempts to impart a nomological aura of universality and necessity to observational insights that are at best conditional, contingent, and context-specific.

It makes sense to speak of an individual agent’s *power to* get things done, and it would be difficult to cease doing so even if we had good reason to try. It is even appropriate to lay emphasis on this agent-centred dimension of power in contexts in which the agent’s power is relatively independent of others. But in many instances we can only make sense of an individual’s *power to* get things done in light of the power they have over others. Caesar’s ability to cross the Rubicon surely depended upon the fact that he was in a position to exercise *power over* his oarsmen. One might insist, as a matter of methodological principle, that there must be an analysis according to which Caesar’s *power over* this or that oarsman was the product of the aggregated *power to* of some relevant group of superordinate agents. But it would be an impracticable task to enumerate these relevant others and to indicate for each of them what exactly they had the *power to* do and how that power affected the *power to* of the oarsman. And the most intuitive test of sufficiency for the description of any such assemblage of agents

would be the question of whether all their *power to* adds up to their having or exercising *power over* the oarsman. For this reason, the principle that says one must always look for aggregations of *power to* may sometimes efface a more intuitive description in terms of *power over*. Yet, it would also be an unduly restrictive theoretical principle to suppose that every description of *power to* must rest upon a deeper analysis of *power over*. It also makes sense, for example, to speak of an individual or group agent, even of humanity as a whole, enhancing or diminishing its *power to* flourish within its non-human environment. It might be shown that this form of power, the macro-power of ecological agency, depends upon how micro-relations of *power over* are arranged, exchanged, sustained and transposed within human societies. We should not presume as much by means of a priori grammatical revision, however. Nor should we suppose that the preservation of such findings would depend upon being able to fix once and for all the official order of the linguistic meanings of 'power'. Let differences in context and purpose determine whether relational or agent-centred descriptions of power should be given primacy.

Theoretical employments of the concept of 'power' serve diverse purposes. One of the most important of these is the aim of analyzing social arrangements and interactions with a view to critical ethical appraisal (Lukes 2005: 65). Hence, we ordinarily speak of the different ways in which power may be distributed, organized and exercised as social phenomena that may be judged as good or bad, better or worse. Yet, certain theoretical strictures on the grammar of 'power' rule out the possibility of making any good sense of this manner of speaking.

Hayward (2000: 116-118), for example, observes that in both relatively privileged and relatively under-privileged educational environments the roles of students and teachers are 'constrained' in various ways by institutional norms that determine what it is possible for them to do or to become. This is true enough. Yet, as Lukes (2005: 105-107) points out, by attempting to make sense of these phenomena as products of a totalizing system of power, she ends up making nonsense of all talk about comparative degrees of power, empowerment, or freedom of action. It may be an abuse of language to speak in absolute terms about 'the powerful' and 'the powerless' in educational contexts in 'contemporary American society', which are the contexts of Hayward's analyses. But those who travel to the most destitute corners of the globe, to the refugee camps where sickly infants lie dying of malnutrition, can hardly find words to describe what they see without speaking of 'utter powerlessness'.

Even more problematic from the standpoint of the ordinary language of power-appraisals are categorically appraisive employments of the concept of 'power' itself. At one extreme, we find the radically demonizing conceptions of power found, for example, in the works of Herbert Marcuse (1964) and of Michel Foucault's middle period (1977 & 1980).² Although they proceed on the basis of sharply contrasting methodologies, both guarantee the absolute malevolence of power. Marcuse deduces power-effects, in a 'descending analysis', from an instrumentalizing intention that, in his view, is constitutive of the modern will to repressive domination (1964: Ch 6). In his 'ascending analysis', Foucault identifies negative and instrumentalizing effects, and then reconstructs power-strategies from these. In both cases, the result is the same: a conception of power as something that can never be organized or exercised in a way that passes the test of critical ethical scrutiny.

Allow me to focus my attention on Foucault's instructive intellectual development. In his middle period, he resisted posing and attempting to answer questions about the legitimacy of power arrangements. Instead, he contended that even when we pose such questions in order 'to show the necessity of imposing limits', and in order to submit power to 'certain rules of right', still, the 'essential function' of our ethical critique will be 'to efface the domination intrinsic to power' (1980: 95). The question of legitimacy belongs to 'the system of right' which is a 'permanent agent', an instrument and mobilizing force, of the relations of domination that belong to power as such. His categorically demonizing grammar of power was a way of forestalling such questions and of challenging the way in which they were typically raised. It is worth noting, however, that in his mature view, Foucault no longer spoke of power exclusively as that which always circulates through a totalizing network of domination, and he no longer spoke of domination as something intrinsic to power. During the last phase of his career, he was careful to distinguish between, on the one hand, 'states of domination' in which 'relations of power are fixed in such a way that they are perpetually asymmetrical and the margin of liberty is extremely limited', and, on the other hand, 'strategic games between liberties' in which power-relations are 'open' (1988a: 11, 12 & 19). In clarifying this distinction, Foucault reverts to a more ordinary and flexible sense of power. In so doing, he also implicitly enters into the language-game of discriminating between legitimate and illegitimate forms of power: 'To exercise power over another in a sort of open strategic game, where things

could be reversed, that is not evil ... The problem is rather to know how to avoid ... the effects of domination' (1988a: 18). This makes good sense. Although we can never transcend power as such, we can raise certain considerations of legitimacy in ways that are not necessarily implicated in or allied with states of domination.

At another linguistic extreme are the beatifying conceptions of power found, for example, in the works of Hannah Arendt and Talcott Parsons. Consider Parson's definition:

Power then is a generalized capacity to secure the performance of binding obligations by units in a system of collective organization when the obligations are legitimized with reference to their bearing on collective goals and where in case of recalcitrance there is a presumption of enforcement by negative situational sanctions—whatever the actual agency of that enforcement. (1963: 237)

Note that Parsons does not mean by 'legitimation' merely to invoke the fact of public consent. He understands legitimation as rational and morally binding consent, and thereby collapses the distinction between the *de facto* and the *de jure* senses of the term. Hence, he states that,

The threat of coercive measures, or of compulsion, without legitimation or justification, should not properly be called the use of power at all, but is the limiting case where power, losing its symbolic character, merges into an intrinsic instrumentality of securing compliance with wishes, rather than obligations. (1963: 250)

By using the concepts of obligation and legitimation as defining terms, Parsons ensures that power cannot conceivably be the kind of institutional subject about which legitimacy remains an open question. Of course, the normative conditions that he builds into his conception of power show that he is not thinking of power *simpliciter*, but of a complex ideal of legitimate ethico-legal-political power.

Arendt similarly guarantees the legitimacy of power as a matter of grammaticality insofar as her theory hinges upon an absolute dissociation of power from strength, independence, and violence. In her view, whereas *strength* is an attribute of individual actors, *power* is exclusively a collective capacity for the performance of concerted actions. But this does not mean that power is a function of multiplying the natural strength of individuals by the number assembled for collective action. The difference between strength and power is not

quantitative, but qualitative and, in particular, moral. Individual strength and independence are qualities that can be augmented by the use of instruments of violence (1969: 46). And, according to Arendt, the use of such means ('like all means') 'always stands in need of guidance and justification through the end it pursues' (51). Power, in contrast, is not the result of an augmentation of individual strength and independence. Far from it: 'it is in the nature of a group and its power to turn against independence, the property of individual strength' (44). Consequently, there is a natural opposition between power and the means of violence that augment individual strength and independence. And, unlike violence, group power 'needs no justification', according to Arendt, because justification is 'inherent in the very existence of political communities'. Power, in her view, is an absolute value, 'an end in itself'. To be sure, she does say of power, that 'what it does need is legitimacy'. But she does not mean that public institutions of power need to be subjected to a special form of critical assessment from the standpoint of a distinctively political ethic. Her distinction between legitimacy and justification does not turn on an ethical difference between public and private values, but on the ontological difference between past and future. 'Legitimacy, when challenged, bases itself on an appeal to the past, while justification relates to an end that lies in the future'. A powerful group can only claim its legitimacy by appealing to its own past, in particular, to its founding moment. The problem with this view is that it makes power self-legitimizing, because every group's founding moment is itself an exercise of its power. Arendt claims that power is exercised 'whenever people get together and act in concert', and that it 'derives its legitimacy from the initial getting together rather than from any action that then may follow' (52). So collective power 'needs' legitimacy in the way that individual strength needs bodily movement. Legitimacy, in this sense, is the essential product and *sine qua non* of the active exercise of power.

Arendt's account of the natural opposition between power and violence is perhaps least compelling when she gets down to specific cases in specific contexts. She claims, for example, that 'the head-on clash between Russian tanks and the entirely non-violent resistance of the Czechoslovak people is a textbook case of a confrontation between violence and power in their pure states' (52-53). On the contrary, from the standpoint of ordinary language and perception, this is not a case of tanks against people, but a case of people with tanks against people without tanks. Must the presence of tanks on one side

erase the fact that there are also Russian people acting in concert to mobilize them? Arendt is not naive, but I fear that she plants the seed of naiveté by advancing as a supposition of political analysis that people never 'get together' in order to do violence. From the standpoint of ordinary perception, this is a false supposition; and as a departure from ordinary language, it is utter nonsense. It is not necessary to employ a revisionist grammar in order to point out that the power of arms as an instrument of political domination is essentially at odds with the social power of free democratic association.

To many political theorists, the error of any categorically appraisive employment of 'power' amounts to a failure to define the concept in 'operational' or categorically value-neutral terms. As I shall argue in the next three sections, however, this reaction is unwarranted. The operationalist's attempt to denude every description of power of any evaluative implications eschews one problematic departure from ordinary language by embracing another.

The Essential Contestability of 'Power'

The wide range of disagreement over the proper use and fundamental significance of power has led many political theorists, after William Connolly (1974 & 1983) and Steven Lukes (1974a), to embrace the thesis that it is an 'essentially contestable' term.³ Appropriating W. B. Gallie's (1956) seminal theory of ethico-political language, these theorists claim that power-analyses will invariably fail to achieve consensus, because theoretical grammars of power express incompatible ethical attitudes, orientations, or points of view, between which no reasoned adjudication is possible.⁴ Consequently, theoretical operationalism in political science is a misguided project insofar as it attempts to define political concepts in precise terms to be embraced by different people regardless of their values or preferences.

I agree that attempts to precisely define a fully operational conception of 'power' invariably fall short of the ideal of complete neutrality and remain, in a sense, philosophically contestable. Yet, I would hesitate to rest this claim on a comprehensive thesis of ethical anti-realism, according to which (1) all statements having appraisive significance are literally false, or alternatively, (2) no statements having appraisive significance can be literally construed as candidates for truth or falsehood.⁵ In a similar vein, I would also hesitate to harness the contestability of political language to a comprehensive ethical

irrationalism, according to which (3) all statements having appraisive significance are unjustifiable, or alternatively, (4) value judgments can neither be justified nor criticized by methods of reasoned argumentation. If any one of these four comprehensive meta-ethical theses were true, then the grammar of ethico-political language would be 'essentially contestable' in an exceedingly strong sense, criticized by many but espoused by few, according to which no well-reasoned considerations could be put forth for favouring one conception of power over another. A plausible contestability thesis would maintain, at most, that there is no neutral and authoritative standard by which to determine which of the various theoretical revisions of 'power' is best.

In order to clarify why the concept of 'power' might be 'essentially contestable' in this weaker sense, it will be helpful to recall here John Gray's correct but somewhat misplaced challenge to any 'strong variant of the contestability thesis' rooted in 'ethical nonnaturalism'. Gray sees that if Gallie, Connolly and Lukes end up stranding ethico-political language on the subjective side of an unbridgeable fact/value gap, then they will be unable to assert as objective fact that acceptance of the contestability thesis would help to allay the evils of theoretical dogmatism and intolerance (1977: 339-40). This criticism unfortunately ignores the fact that the thesis of essential contestability rests on the repudiation of any systematic compartmentation of descriptive and appraisive meanings. The contestability thesis is therefore not linked to 'ethical nonnaturalism', but to the weaker claim that there are competing canons for assessing truths and giving reasons within ethico-political discourse. Lukes explains this point well by contrasting the different methods of ethical reasoning with the 'non-relative truth conditions' and 'non-relative principles of reasoning' typically employed in the physical sciences. Unlike scientific hypotheses, 'moral judgements may be incompatible but equally rational, because criteria of rationality and justification in morals are themselves relative to conflicting and irreconcilable perspectives' (Lukes 1974b: 172). Tully (2003) similarly argues that different theoretical models of the practices of critical ethical reasoning contain philosophically contestable strictures and aspirations, such that it may not be reasonable to expect every reasonable person to reflect and reach agreements in accordance with the same fundamental set of standards, methods and procedures. Those who follow these paths would clearly not become incapable of making truth claims or well-reasoned arguments for their favoured conceptions of 'power', 'liberty', and so on. Yet, they would have to accept that others might reasonably disagree; for those others

may have their own favoured criteria, methods and procedures of ethico-political reasoning. According to this standard defence of the contestability thesis, only if there is such a singular thing as '*the moral point of view*' could reasonable contestation between competing theoretical conceptions of 'power' be put to rest once and for all.

For many critics of the contestability thesis, this line of argument appears to usher in the spectre of incommensurability and naked conflict. Gray, for example, remarks that 'if there are really any cases where an incommensurability thesis holds good, then it follows that any dispute which exists cannot be a definitional dispute about the proper criteria for a concept which the disputants hold in common, but rather a conflict between adherents of mutually unintelligible world-views' (1977: 342). Christine Swanton similarly claims that 'an appeal to incommensurability supports the thesis that concepts are essentially contested at the cost of denying that they are contested' (1985: 823). Again, her contention is that the putative incommensurability of divergent grammars of power would foreclose on the possibility of mutually intelligible symbolic contestation and throw contestants into a condition of mere conflict.

In order to respond adequately to this line of resistance to the contestability thesis, we must move beyond meta-ethical considerations and focus, instead, on how the dimension of power itself conditions theoretical contestation over the grammar of 'power'. If our conceptions of power are partly constitutive of political reality (Searle 2003), then they will invariably enter into power struggles over the shape of that reality. According to Gallie's original definition, an essentially contestable concept is an internally complex, initially ambiguous, and persistently vague concept that speakers use aggressively and defensively in competing appraisals of human practice (Gallie 1956: 168). Quite apart from the standard defence of the contestability thesis, according to which there are incommensurable theoretical frameworks of ethical appraisal, aggressive and defensive manipulations of the grammar of 'power' may be essentially contestable in a third, purely political and even weaker sense.

Even when examined only as a phenomenon of political language (or power-language), the contestability of theoretical grammars may be variously understood. On one hand, the contestable grammar of 'power' may be understood to arise simply from the dispersion of linguistic power within the field of theoretical discourse, which alone will invariably make it impracticable for one theoretical approach to dictate its grammatical strictures to another. Or, it may be understood

to persist, in a manner both intractable and fractious, through an antipodal ideological struggle within theoretical discourse. Despite the fact that a general sense of ideological polarization often informed contestation over the grammar of 'power' during the Cold War period (Deacon 2003), I wish to contend that the theoretical grammar of power is essentially contestable only in the former, weaker sense. To support this contention, I must take issue with Connolly's (1983) ideologically bipolar account.

The Contest of Grammars: Bipolar or Pluralistic?

Connolly attempts to explain the essential contestability of 'power' by identifying two competing conceptual 'paradigms'; one centred around the basic concept of *power to*, and the other around *power over*. Both paradigms are 'formed from a moral, or more broadly, normative point of view' (1983: 24). Whereas proponents of *power over* acknowledge their underlying normative commitments, the operationalist proponents of *power to* purport to advance a normatively neutral understanding of power. Contrary to the protestations of operationalists, the basic concepts of *power to* and *power over* express different and fundamentally incompatible normative assessments of prevailing arrangements of social power. They belong, respectively, to assenting and dissenting ideologies of the political present (1983: 87).

The basic conception of *power to*, which Connolly identifies as the favourite of a typically 'moderate' social scientific establishment, privileges the point of view of the powerful. It emphasizes their accomplishments, and downplays how and how much these accomplishments burden or constrain those who occupy subordinate social positions. This focus also tends to go hand in hand with the perceived need to restrict attributions of power to agents who *intend, are aware of, and/or benefit from* its effects. And it tends to register the negative effects of power, the burdens it imposes on those in subordinate positions, only on occasions when the intentional, self-aware and/or beneficial achievements of power are won in the face of direct opposition from others. In these three ways, theories of power centred upon the basic concept of *power to* are said to be 'often congenial to élites' (107). Contrarily, by employing *power over* as the basic term of political analysis, 'radical' or dissenting political theorists seek to privilege the point of view of those who occupy subordinate social positions. Thus, in Connolly's view, an attribution of *power over* is a tacit

accusation, which demands from the powerful some justification of their position, their holdings, or their conduct (1983: 97 & 244fn5).

Although this analysis of the theoretical discourse of power at least captures certain familiar stereotypes, it is worth noting, for the sake of greater clarity, its simplifications. Connolly invokes, as part of the politically salient background to his discourse analysis, a strikingly polarized picture of the social distribution of power. He draws a sharp division between, on one side, powerful elites and congenial moderates, and, on the other side, those they conspire (consciously or not) to subjugate. Significantly, however, Connolly's anti-pluralism remains a highly controversial view even within the theoretical paradigm centred around *power over*. Hence, contrary to his account, contestation of this sort over the distribution of *power over* undermines its status as the basic term of a radical anti-pluralist paradigm.

Dahl (1961), for example, presents a pluralistic view of the distribution of power in society in his attempt to answer the supposedly 'radical' question of who has power over whom. If it is fair to characterize Dahl as a moderate, the primary difference between his moderate political orientation and Connolly's radicalism does not appear to consist in conflicting attitudes towards *power over*, but rather, in different accounts of its distribution, its relative concentration or dispersion among controlling or competing social groups. The attribution of *power over* (including the genus of *power over* we are calling *power over/against*) to a plurality of disparate, competing social groups may carry with it the same negative moral presumption that Connolly embraces; but this presumption, when informed by the pluralist's conception of how power is arrayed in society, need not support the same brand of radical dissent. This is not to say that pluralism about the distribution of power in society is necessarily a *conservative* or anti-progressive doctrine. Harold Laski (1917 & 1919), for example, offers a form of pluralism designed to unhinge assumptions about centralized sovereign power and to embolden the permeation of various existing institutions with projects of socialistic reform. And Kirstie McClure (1992) offers a like-minded 'third generation' pluralism for a politics of identity which seeks out unofficial channels for the transformation of political culture. Along these routes, political pluralism is not anti-radical, but only anti-cynical, because it supports optimism about prospects for the accumulation of radical social transformations accomplished piecemeal through a multiplicity of social practices. Thus, Dahl's moderateness lies not so much in his pluralism about the social distribution of *power over*, but

in his narrow focus on conflicts of revealed preferences publicly enacted through electoral channels.

It would be convenient if the facts alone could resolve the dispute between polarizing and pluralistic interpretations of the present social distribution of power. But as Lukes emphasizes, our perception of the putative facts themselves are often determined, in part, by the different ways in which theoretical rules of representation stipulate how human interests can conceivably enter into power relations. By returning to this element of theoretical discourse, we can see that the division between moderate and radical theories opens up, not over the question of which basic conception of 'power' (*power to* or *power over*) should be master, but instead, over the question of what kinds of interests are at stake.

We have already reviewed the different criteria employed by Dahl, Bachrach-Baratz, and Lukes for identifying the opposing interests that determine relations of *power over/against*. To repeat, we can look for this form of power, first, in open and public conflicts between revealed preferences; in second-order conflicts over control of the social channels of expression and representation that provide opportunities for public conflicts between revealed preferences; and, thirdly, in underlying conflicts involving real but counterfactual (hypothetical or ethically stipulated) interests. Whereas a plurality of social groups may be said on occasion to exercise one-dimensional *power over/against* others, only the elite among those groups will be able to command all three dimensions. The latter group clearly also bear a heavier burden of justification, because the multi-dimensional power they wield has profound and insidious effects on those who suffer it. As Lukes suggests, it would be 'the supreme exercise of power to get another or others to have the desires you want them to have—that is, to secure their compliance by controlling their thoughts and desires' (1974a: 23). Accordingly, the 'three-dimensional' theory of power, which combines all three criteria, has the advantage of making sense of 'radical' interpretations of modern political society. In contrast, Bachrach-Baratz's analysis of power relations, which moves solely along the first two dimensions, has moderate 'reformist' implications; and in the works of Dahl and others, exclusive adherence to the first criterion 'inevitably takes over the bias of the political system under observation' (Lukes 1974a: 57).

Thus, perceptions of plurality or polarity in the social distribution of *power over/against*, and the strength of any moral presumption against those in positions of power, tend to vary according to theoret-

ical grammars linking power with different conceptions of human 'interests'. As Lukes (2005: 83) has more recently and rightly argued, the ordinary concept of 'power' itself does not tell us which of these theoretical grammars to embrace. Indeed, I would add that the open-textured grammar of ordinary language seems the most reasonable, because it allows us to render context-dependent judgments about the kinds of interests at stake in specific power relations. Moreover, in his revised account of 'power,' Lukes acknowledges that, by focusing exclusively on *power over/against*, his earlier (1974) three-dimensional conception of power was unduly restrictive. Power is better understood as the ability of agents 'to bring about significant effects, specifically by furthering their own interests and/or affecting the interests of others, whether positively or negatively' (2005: 65). In this sense *power over* is not necessarily *power against*, and both of these are 'subspecies' of *power to* (68). If agent-centred and relational conceptions of 'power' ever formed the bases of conflicting conceptual paradigms, Lukes' mature political theory has clearly moved beyond them by offering a more comprehensive and flexible analysis of the ordinary concept.

Ethically significant differences in the interpretation of *power over* can also hinge upon the kinds of intentions or will-formations that, for various theoretical grammars, can or cannot conceivably enter into relations of power. According to Weber's (1978) fairly flexible view, those over whom power is exercised are not necessarily the instruments of the will that overcomes their resistance. Moreover, an agent's capacity to overcome resistance from others, and thereby to frustrate their desires, need not be construed as anything more than an ancillary content of her will. In other words, the capacity to triumph over and to frustrate others is an essential means, but not necessarily the basic aim of those who exercise *power over* in the Weberian sense. In contrast, by inverting this basic grammar of means and ends, Herbert Marcuse's (1964) relatively restrictive 'logic of domination' singles out modern man's tendency to bring his technological capabilities to bear in social processes of repressive domination that reduce human beings to instruments or resources to be used for an indeterminate range of ends (1964, Ch 6). In contradistinction to Marcuse's logic, Georg Simmel's (1950) social theory offers a third way of understanding the volitional element in power relations. According to Simmel, those who occupy the subordinate position in relations of domination are never—i.e., necessarily not—reduced to the status of mere instruments of the superordinate's will. Domination is a form of

social interaction or ‘sociation’, and ‘the moral maxim never to use a man as a mere means is actually the formula of every sociation’ (182). According to Simmelian social theory, the Marcusean instrumentalizing will to power is conceptually nonsensical and can form no part of the phenomena of power relations. The outer limit of sociation is not instrumentalization but direct physical violation. Of these three, only Marcuse’s narrow conception of the inherently instrumentalizing intentionality of power lends direct support to anti-pluralism about the social distribution of power. Yet, as Lukes (2005: 76) argues, since ‘most of our actions bring in their wake innumerable chains of unintended consequences,’ it is a mistake to embrace any necessary connections between power and intentionality at the level of conceptual grammar. Indeed, the common theoretical assumption that power must be intentionally exercised may blind us to its most insidious forms. The powerful often do not intend the harms they cause or the constraints they impose upon others. Nor need the assumption that the powerful intend to dominate others be maintained as a condition of accountability. It may often be sufficient that the powerful be judged negligent or indifferent to the effects of their power.

In sum, different conceptions of human interests and intentions are far more significant indicators of ideological orientation than a shared theoretical commitment to relational conceptions of ‘power’. We should therefore hesitate to embrace Connolly’s suggestion that theoretical grammars of *power over* are invariably more politically radical than the agent-centred alternatives.

Perhaps more problematic is Connolly’s placement of theories of *power to* on the opposite, moderate side of his account of the discourse of power. It should be readily apparent from a quick glance at the list of adherents in the first section that theories of *power to* do not belong to a paradigm of political moderation. Hobbes and Russell, for instance, make odd ideological bedfellows. Lukes has managed to move from a fundamentally relational conception of power (1974) to a fundamental agent-centred conception (2005) without changing his political stripes (or the title of his book). Moreover, recent modes of radical feminist thought have moved away from thinking about power exclusively as a category of conflict, and have emphasized, instead, the empowerment of women as the cultivation of their independent agency. For example, in Janet Flammang’s list of the very different concerns of conventional and feminist political theories (respectively) we find the following: ‘... powerful vs. powerless, insiders vs. outsiders, elite vs. mass, interest groups vs. social movements, electoral

politics vs. familial politics, political parties vs. voluntary associations, opinions vs. consciousness, *power over* vs. *power to*, force vs. empowerment ...' (1997: 4, my emphasis).

Furthermore, contrary to Connolly's characterization of the ideological import of agent-centred conceptions of 'power', it is doubtful that there is an available, coherent normative point of view from which the attribution of the bare capacity to get things done is presumptively commendatory. On this point, I feel compelled to point out that the remarkable efficiency of the Nazi regime is ordinarily understood to add not to its credit, but to its infamy. One typically wants to know the nature of the achievements or the ends of power before judging it. This is not to say that no one ever becomes enamoured of *power to* as such, and for its own sake. The compulsion to throw in one's lot with the powerful for no other reason than that they are powerful is a dangerous and all-too-common pathology of political psychology. Indeed, it may supply part of the answer to Etienne de la Boetie's (1942) challenging question of 'how it happens that so many men, so many villages, so many cities, so many nations, sometimes suffer under a single tyrant who has no other power than the power they give him'. But it is apparent that one does not succumb to this pathology simply by making *power to* the basic term of one's analysis of political affairs.

In order to clarify my argument, it is worth pointing out that the problem with Connolly's (1983) account of theoretical discourse is not that his preferred relational grammar begs the question of how social power is actually arrayed in favour of anti-pluralism. The basic choice between relational and agent-centred grammars of power leaves this question open. The problem is that this fact impugns Connolly's claim that fundamentally agent-centred grammars of power are 'congenial to élites'. It is a mistake to imagine that genuine ideological conflict emerges at the level of basic theoretical commitments to relational or agent-centred conceptions of power.

Even if social power is radically bipolar, control over theoretical discourse is not. The pluralistic nature of theoretical discourse has certain practical implications that broader analyses of political discourse often ignore (Hook 2001). If theoretical discourse were neatly polarized, then it would be easier for radical egalitarian theory to radicalize the social world in its own image. Indeed, this may have been one of the aims behind the simplifications of Connolly's early (1983) discourse analysis. Yet, radical political thought as such is paradigmatically unparadigmatic insofar as it tends to set itself against

everything centralized, dogmatic, rigidly structured, normalized and conventional. There is always something self-abnegating, or at least self-limiting, about the urge to radical orthodoxy. Accordingly, in his more recent work, Connolly (1995: 94 & 197) has rightly problematized the very idea of a radical paradigm centred upon any grammatically restrictive theoretical fundaments. Following Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 7-13), radical political thought and practice can at best be decentred and 'rhizomatic'. If there are common themes (as distinct from a shared grammatical discipline) among post-Marxist radicalisms, they are to be found in the emphasis on 'an ethos of critical responsiveness' in which theorists exercise critical intellectual independence in their attempts to discover and articulate forbidden or subjugated truths (Connolly 1995: 154).

To sum up, I have been maintaining that 'power' is an essentially contestable concept not because the choice between fundamentally agent-centred and relational grammars is ideologically determinative, but because the interests and intentions that are allowed as a matter of theoretical grammar to enter into the analysis of *power over* are open to diverse ethical interpretations, and because choices between these grammars are often elements of political power-language strategies. Even ordinary language fails to transcend power, because it serves, among other things, as a language of political speech. Yet, I wish to suggest that, as our common linguistic medium, it houses the greatest potential for linguistic mediation among political theorists, and between such political authorities and a broader public audience. To see the mediatory potential of ordinary language more clearly, it will be helpful to examine how common forms of speech can be at once strategic and communicative, a possibility which is too often overlooked by critics of the contestability thesis.

Meaningful Political Language: 'Civic Lexicon' or Shared Medium of Discursive Strategies?

Theoretical operationalism, from Hobbes to Oppenheim, has traditionally been motivated by misgivings, not only about putatively misguided rival theoretical grammars, but also and more fundamentally about the promiscuity of ordinary language itself. The latter concern is that ordinary language is a hopelessly chaotic medium that makes genuine communication impossible. Indeed, the reach of this theoretical anxiety over the vagaries of ordinary language extends beyond

the familiar concerns of traditional operationalism to include even Terence Ball's (1993) response to Connolly. Although Ball professes in his earlier reflections on the concept of power to 'lean rather more towards an ordinary language approach' (1978: 609), he nevertheless agrees with Gray (1977) and Swanton (1985) in rejecting the essential contestability of the concept on grounds that this thesis implies the impossibility of communication and community. In his more mature view (1993), unless participants in public discourse 'attach much the same meanings' to their 'common stock of words', they will be unable, by means of those words, to effect 'communications' or, in the words of De Jouvenel (1957: 304), 'the action of mind upon mind'. Thus, discursive resolution of differences requires, as a precondition, a 'common moral language or civic lexicon' (Ball 1993: 555). If communication is the transmission of subjective meanings without alteration or distortion from one mind to another, then we should conclude that people communicate only in virtue of their mutual recognition of a single, unequivocal public code of objective meanings. Furthermore, if communication in this sense is what makes community possible, then we have no hope of living in community with others without a civic lexicon of shared moral meanings. Again, the worry is that we inhabit the linguistic equivalent of a Hobbesian state of nature if we lack a shared theoretical grammar and fail to converge on questions of semantics: 'Hobbes' state of nature is nothing less than a condition in which the thesis of essential contestability is imagined to be true' (1993: 555).

I find this line of argument perplexing. Communication is not a 'Vulcan mind-meld', in which one mind acts directly upon another.⁶ It is, instead, a mode of interaction mediated by terms of natural language, many of which are somewhat ambiguous or vague in their ordinary signification. Only a highly idealized notion of meaningful communicative practice implies that the ordinary condition of conceptual contestation is an unfortunately anarchical, pre-institutional condition. The linguistic equivalent of the Hobbesian state of nature would be a condition so chaotic as to be entirely devoid of mutually meaningful linguistic interaction. Yet, it is apparent that we would not inhabit such a condition even if Connolly's radically polarized account of the theoretical discourse of 'power' were accurate. One of the undeniable features of the exchanges between, for example, Dahl and Lukes, or Oppenheim and Connolly, is the fact that, for the most part, they are able to understand one another, even as they advance divergent theoretical grammars of power. Some form of communication

occurs between them, even if it does not amount to undistorted reciprocal transmissions of subjective mental contents. What we need is an account of ordinary political language capable of accommodating and explaining this fact.

Ball is unable to account for the possibility of mutual intelligibility in the midst of conceptual disputation because he mistakenly treats a semantic presupposition of monological demonstration as a pragmatic precondition for meaningful dialogue. If we assume that political dialogue is essentially a collective effort to produce logically sound deductive arguments, then we would certainly have to adopt, as a general rule of political discourse, that ‘different speakers may not use the same expression with different meanings’ (Habermas 1990: 86). But as Jürgen Habermas points out, the assumption that we must adopt this rule for pragmatic purposes of communication rests upon a category mistake.

It is possible to think in syllogisms, but not to conduct a dialogue in them. I can use syllogistic reasoning to yield arguments for a discussion, but I cannot argue syllogistically with an other ... Not every communication, however, is merely the subsumption of the individual under an abstract universal, or what is in principle mute subjection to a public monologue that everyone can reproduce for himself. On the contrary, every dialogue develops on an entirely different basis, namely that of the reciprocal recognition of subjects. (1990: 86-94)

Participants in an open politico-theoretic dialogue who wish to specify their subject by invoking a particular sense of the concept of ‘power’ are expected to have reasons for selecting from among the ordinary range of available meanings *for that occasion*; but they can hardly be expected to deduce their basic terms of analysis. In order to offer good reasons with confidence on this level of reflection, participants should have a competent grasp of available alternative senses. This basic dialogical competence would have little or no value, however, in a discourse governed by Ball’s rule of univocal speech.

Although confusions often result from the divergent ways in which different speakers use the same expression, such difficulties are often overcome, and mutual intelligibility is often achieved, by means of the explicative statements and interpretive efforts made by proponents of competing theoretical grammars. Philosophical work in the area of speech pragmatics may help us to see what makes this communicative success possible. As H. P. Grice (1957) and P. F. Strawson (1964) show—in their respective critiques of the formalist

orthodoxy in semantic theory and the conventionalist orthodoxy in speech-act theory—the success of discrete communicative speech acts need not depend upon conventional applications of linguistic meanings. Instead, communication is achieved by getting one's audience to recognize one's intention to communicate in some recognizable way or other. Communication consists in gaining recognition of such reflexive, audience-directed intentions, and this is often achieved without reliance upon, and even in the absence of, precise agreement in linguistic convention.

Connolly's (1983) account of politico-theoretic discourse, although excessively polarizing, has the virtue of invoking an understanding of political language for which disputation over basic terms is not an insurmountable obstacle to mutual intelligibility. He cites with approval John Pocock's 'Clausewitzian' theory of political speech, which sees paradigmatically political speech as warfare elevated above the medium of violence, and conducted, instead, as 'an intelligent, and so intelligible, communicative, political mode of behaviour' (Pocock 1984: 32). Far from depending upon a civic lexicon of concordant meanings, mutual intelligibility is a matter of reciprocal enunciation and interpretation of discursive strategies. The ordinary linguistic medium of strategic communication 'cannot be wholly controlled by any single or isolable agency' because, contrary to Ball's view, it is already a shared institution, and because 'institutionalization breeds ambivalence, or rather multivalence' (32). Since the elements of articulate expression and manoeuvre belong to a common, open-textured language, no single disputant can reasonably expect to impose universal agreement by definitional fiat. 'Language gives me power, but power which I cannot fully control or prevent others from sharing. In performing a verbalized act of power, I enter upon a polity of shared power' (31). In short, a univocal civic lexicon is a practical impossibility, not because everyone must speak a private language of her own design (the view Ball attributes to Connolly and others who embrace the contestability thesis), but because everyone must speak a public language which is not of her own design, and which she can therefore only partially manipulate to her own ends. The emphasis here upon 'shared power' in our language polity is happily pluralistic. It is true enough of political speech in general, but especially true of theoretical discourse.

Pocock's realistic theory of strategic communication succeeds where Ball's theory fails, not only by accounting for the fact of mutual intelligibility between proponents of competing theoretical

grammars, but also by providing a more compelling characterization of what it means to inhabit the linguistic equivalent of a Hobbesian state of nature. With reference to Lewis Carroll (1918), Pocock invokes not the unfortunate absence of an operational civic lexicon, but rather the misguided effort to construct one.

Humpty Dumpty, as is well known, avers that when I use a word, it means what I want it to mean, neither more nor less ... The question is who is to be master, that's all. This poor being is in the linguistic equivalent of a Hobbesian state of nature; it has not occurred to him that words subject to one person's total arbitrary control may become unintelligible to those hearing them, and so of very little use for purposes even of mastery. (31)

Humpty Dumpty, it predictably turns out, fails to establish meaningful dialogue with Alice, who eventually departs in frustration. It is important to note, however, how Pocock misquotes Carroll. Although the egg-man does seem disposed to imagine that he is engaged in linguistic power struggles with Alice, the central question he raises (to himself) is not '*who* is to be master', but '*which* is to be master', the speaker or the elements of speech. About the latter, he immediately adds, 'They've a temper, some of them—particularly verbs: they're the proudest—adjectives you can do anything with, but not verbs—however, *I* can manage the whole lot of them!' (Carroll 1910: Ch 6). Humpty Dumpty's reflection on 'mastery' has to do, not so much with his efforts to master Alice as a specific adversary, but with his solipsistic struggle against ordinary language itself. Linguistic anarchy ensues, not when everyone speaks a vernacular tongue profuse with ambiguities and latent meanings, but when different speakers depart from ordinary language in idiosyncratic ways.

Although Alice's frustration is instructive, a more philosophically reflective response should have something more to say to the operationalist in parting. I would offer the following. Theorists who seek unilaterally to impose a univocal civic lexicon of putatively operational meanings must ultimately trade upon the richness of ordinary language that they seek to constrain. Otherwise, in this case, the theorist's idiosyncratic designs for the concept would not appear to be about the phenomena of power at all.⁷ To depart systematically from the way we ordinarily use words is to turn away from the only shared medium through which we can mediate between contested grammars and restore or establish linguistic agreement. This, I believe, is the upshot of the close analogy that Stanley Cavell (1976: 73-96 & 1996:

24) draws between the articulation of linguistic intuitions in ordinary language philosophy and the act of aesthetic judgment, as understood by Kant. In both cases, agreement is not that which we presuppose (*pace* Ball), least of all as a matter of convention, but rather, agreement is that towards which we implicitly aspire. Stephen Mulhall clarifies this point best, on Cavell's behalf, when he explains that such judgments 'constitute a means of exploring or mapping the extent of that agreement' (1994: 10). The combination of 'exploring' and 'mapping' is particularly lucid here for the way it invokes the uncertain frontier of linguistic consensus, or coalition-building, which involves not only uncertainty about the breadth of the audience whose assent we might gain, but also uncertainty about how far we might be willing to go to accommodate conditions of agreement that others place upon what we say. There is no such frontier for a fully operational technical language. Its significations are fixed and cannot move laterally, as it were, across a horizontal plane of social meanings.

Instead, in contrast with common parlance, operational languages tend to facilitate what Bryan Norton (2005: Ch 1) calls 'towering', which is the social process whereby narrow technical sciences become entrenched within institutional channels of political decision-making and insulated from open, democratic engagement. Norton describes the experience of moving between the towers of the U.S. Environmental Protection agency as a confusing transition between languages that have become incommensurable by becoming technically operational. Further, he observes that when policy-making institutions employ narrowly focused technical experts, and artificially separate the process of gathering and organizing data from the process of setting goals and evaluating options, they become particularly vulnerable to manipulation by powerful interests. The pragmatic solution he recommends is, in part, a Habermasian discourse ethic for institutions of environmental management. Taking ordinary language and context-specific experience as starting points, he recommends the construction of conceptual 'bridge terms' that might span the gaps between linguistic towers and bring expert knowledge into engagement with public discourse about social values (2005: 38). Unfortunately, Norton's theory of 'sustainability', as both a 'communal' value and a term of ecological science, does not include sustained attention to the problems of political domination (*power over*) that impede the effective exercise of ecologically informed agency (*power to*) in local, national and global contexts. He understands the failures of the EPA as failures of communication, and

offers a solution that invokes an ideal of communicative action that purports to transcend power-language.

In many ways, Bent Flyvbjerg (1993) offers a complementary diagnosis of failures of environmental planning in Denmark. But his analysis *Rationality and Power: Democracy in Practice* is a sustained, twenty year long, context-driven exploration and mapping of power structures, powerful agents, power relations, and power strategies and tactics. Thus, his method, his diagnosis, and his more overtly political (or oppositional) prescription are perhaps even more congenial to my purposes here. His 'Wittgensteinian' methodology does not proceed on the basis of a conceptual map drawn up prior to experience, but rather through a series of narratives that reveal the strategies and tactics of powerful interests (1993: 5-8). By taking his readers behind the scenes of the famous 'Aalborg Project',⁸ he shows that it is a mistake to suppose that power should be identified with its most publicly visible operations, or that the powerful enhance their capacities by understanding reality and securing legitimation from independent standards of public reason. To the contrary, if the Aalborg Project is exemplary, it suggests that even in the western world's most mature democracy power elites tend to dominate processes of social development by determining what counts as rational, informed decision-making (1998: 226-30). Flyvbjerg concludes that political power is typically, or too often, beyond rational democratic regulation. Yet, his neo- or post-Foucauldian account of the ways in which power produces its own rationalizations and suppresses contrary reasons draws upon multiscalar analyses of both powerful agents and entrenched social structures (15-17 & 174-178). It does not present power as a totalizing system within which it is meaningless to speak about who exercises power over whom, about whose interests are furthered and whose are frustrated, and about how to enact effective oppositional power-strategies. Nor does it represent an effort to impugn the question of legitimacy, but rather to raise and reformulate it in more sensible terms. He makes a compelling case for giving poor marks to modern, putatively democratic polities. They do not, and perhaps cannot, live up to their own discursive ideals; for 'forms of participation that are practical, committed, and ready for conflict provide a superior paradigm of democratic virtue than forms of participation that are discursive, detached, and consensus-dependent, that is, rational' (1998: 236). I would add to Flyvbjerg's own explicit conclusions that where powerful agents dominate others by manipulating symbolic, epistemic and normative social systems we must question

whether it makes good political sense to conceive of legitimacy, in the fashion of political liberalism, as conformity to public reason (Rawls 1993). A republican conception of legitimacy as non-domination in arrangements of social power (Pettit 1997) may end up being fairer to the least powerful members of society and more effective for purposes of enhancing that shared form of *power to* that I have been calling ecological agency.

Mediating the Discourse of 'Power'

One might reasonably worry that a purely Clausewitzian language polity is an unreceptive environment for linguistic mediation. Mediation is a discursive undertaking that turns on a richer conception of the possibilities of political relatedness than one enlivened by nothing more than the distinction between friend and enemy. Yet, even within contexts marked by polarized political discourse, it is often possible, and sometimes practically or ethically desirable, to draw a further distinction between discursive combatants and mediators. Political speech in the one-dimensional sense of the political, familiar from Carl Schmitt (1976), Connolly (1983), Chantal Mouffe (1993), and other critics of liberalism, aspires to nothing more than strategic communication for purposes of engagement with enemies or adversaries. But it is certainly possible, within a tumultuous language polity, for speakers to broach a second dimension of politics. Pocock's theory of political speech, for all its emphasis on the first dimension of politics, ends up by accommodating this possibility:

I am clearly not presenting language as a neutrally objective medium, though I will at need argue from these premises that there are neutral and objective operations that can be performed with it. (1984: 32)

If we reach the point of uttering statements about the medium, its frictions and our strategies in making use of these, which are not merely moves in the power game but clarificatory utterances simultaneously usable by both players, we have reached the point of theory—of making utterances about utterances which possess a certain objectivity that permits them to perform a further mediatory and communicative function. (33)

Clearly, if 'utterances' can play a mediatory role in the context of agonistic political speech, then so can speakers.

I have claimed that ordinary language is the best medium for integrating the different senses of 'power' and mediating between

traditionally divergent theoretical perspectives. I have also invoked Habermas's criticism of monological theories of political language in my response to Ball (1993), and mentioned Norton's (2005) use of Habermas's discourse ethic in responding to the 'towering' effect of incommensurable operational languages. So, I should now explain how the kind of strategy of conceptual mediation by means of ordinary language that I am defending here differs from the all-inclusive ethic of Habermasian discourse.

Central to Habermas's transcendental-pragmatic derivation of a liberal ethic of open and inclusive political discourse is a sharp distinction between strategic action and communicative action. Unlike the clash of political strategies, communication, in his view, involves consensually coordinated interactions oriented to mutual understanding (1990: 58). This distinction breaks down, however, in the heat of political speech. As Pocock illustrates, 'In archaic and formal English, a communication of information was sometimes introduced by the imperative verb: "Know that" and the message would follow; the imperative left no doubt that to inform might be to act upon and to command' (1984: 28). The fact that in speaking politically we attempt (however indirectly) to have power-effects does not preclude our speech acts from being communicative, or, in other words, from having power-effects upon the minds of others, including others who are in many ways far from like-minded. Once one concedes, as I have, that the language of 'power' does not transcend its object-domain, and that we are participants in a tumultuous (if not politically bipolar) language polity, it is not open to us to justify philosophical efforts at conceptual mediation on the basis of Habermas's formal-pragmatic distinction between strategic and communicative speech acts. The attempt to give voice to the ordinary linguistic common ground available within theoretical discourse may be variously rooted, instead, in a commitment to the political value of what Brian Barry (1995) calls 'second-order impartiality' in contexts in which norms are evaluated and selected, in an effort to democratize political expertise for a pragmatic 'method of intelligence' (Dewey 1927: 126 & 206), in a general attitude of skepticism about 'persuasive definitions' (Stevenson 1938), in resistance to the 'order-words' of technical grammaticality (Deleuze & Guatarri 1986: Ch 4), in a 'politics of superficiality' (Cavell 1982: 158), and so on. It would be hopelessly contestable to assert the pre-eminence of any of these concerns as regulative for theoretical discourse in general. There may be many reasons for leaving the grammar of

'power' in its ordinary, open-textured condition. We shall not thereby manage to overcome political contestation in an ideal liberal consensus that transcends power, but we might at least shift the focus of contestation from the formalities of political grammar to the more substantive questions of apt political description and judgment.

It may be that theoretical mediation through ordinary language can at best articulate a linguistic common ground that remains 'necessarily vague' (Berlin, 1969: 168; Walzer, 2000: 81). There is no need to worry, however, that vagueness on the level of the ordinary grammar of 'power' will infect every dimension of political understanding. There are other, better ways of being precise in the identification of specific forms of power. Here, in contrast with Hobbes's attempt to operationalize the concept of power as such, it is instructive to think of John Locke's treatment of irreducibly distinct power-phenomena. In *Leviathan*, Hobbes is only able to distinguish between duly instituted political power and coercively acquired despotic or 'paternal' power by drawing a distinction between different motives of submission. Whereas the former depends upon our generalized fear of others, the latter depends upon our fear of the specific person or group to whom we submit (1991: II.xx). Both motives of submission give rise to a genus of power that always amounts to the capacity of empowered (*in power*) persons to do whatever they may happen to want (1991: I.x). In contrast, in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke surmises that power is a simple and indefinable idea (1959: II.vii.8 & III.iv.4). In *Two Treatises of Government*, he repeatedly favours adherence to the 'plain meaning' of words. Technical terms crafted precisely to suit the speakers own purposes 'always prove ... deformed, lame, and useless' (1988: I.vi.60). Yet, without the aid of a general definition of 'power' (or, better, aided by the linguistic indeterminacy of 'power'), Locke is better able than his philosophical predecessor to differentiate between the various conditions and techniques that sustain empirically distinct forms of power. We do not improve political perception and understanding by trying to reduce to a common form or genus the powers exercised by 'a magistrate over a subject ... a father over his children, a master over his servant, a husband over his wife, and a lord over his slave' (1988: II.i.2). Here, precision and clarity come not from a conceptual definition of power as such, but from interpretive differentiation of what we ordinarily understand to be power-phenomena.⁹ This way of discriminating between distinct forms of power has the virtue of placing philosophical controversies on empirical and interpretive footings, which are

more amenable to reasoned engagement and resolution than the clash of divergent grammatical strictures.

From the standpoint of ordinary language, most of the theoretical grammars canvassed in the first section delineate different senses of power and direct our attention towards different kinds of power-phenomena.¹⁰ There is no contradiction involved in employing most of these different senses on suitable occasions (Gray 1977: 334). Confusions can be allayed as long as speakers adequately clarify whatever form of power they wish to explain or critique. Logical fallacies can be avoided as long as speakers refrain from attempting to draw deductive inferences about one aspect or form of power from premises about another. And questions of legitimacy can be raised as long as we avoid speaking of power in ways which purport to be both grammatically exclusive of other senses and categorically appraisive.

The grammatical contortions of political theorists have a certain intellectual charm that the most mundane locutions of ordinary language lack; so, I should conclude by apologizing for attempting to spoil such academic sweetmeats. A warning is in order as well. We should not be too self-indulgent in the exercise of mastery over grammars all our own if, as I believe, widespread theoretical abandonment of plain speech imperils an array of more important shared concerns, including the articulation of dissent to particular forms of power, the mobilization of common sense, the education of an engaged citizenry, the practice of grass-roots democracy, the institution of transparency in political discourse, the discursive mediation of conflicting perspectives, and clear communication across disciplinary boundaries. Empirical insight gains little from exclusionary grammatical innovation. And extraordinary ways of speaking about power may be licensed, not by the pretensions of operationalism, but by context-specific political experiences and by the richness of our open-textured language itself.

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Notes

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2. Foucault's 'middle period' extends from *Discipline and Punish* (1977) through the contents of *Power/Knowledge* (1980). The essay on 'The Subject and Power' (1982) appears to mark a significant point of transition towards his mature view in 'The Ethic of Care for the Self' (1988).
3. Gallie (1956) proposed a theory of 'essentially contested *concepts*'. Following Ricciardi (2001: 55), however, I prefer to speak of essentially contestable words or terms, and I use concept to refer to more formal elements of political theory abstracted from ordinary language.
4. Gallie does not include power among the class of essentially contestable concepts, which he limits to words signifying ethico-political ideals. With the exception of Arendt (see section 5), no one seems to conceive of power as a social ideal.
5. Here, in distinguishing two kinds of ethical anti-realism, I am following Jeffrey Sayre-McCord (1986: 4-5). I prefer to speak of 'statements having appraisive significance' rather than 'value-judgments' or 'normative claims' because the latter terms of analysis characterize statements as being categorically or exclusively appraisive. In ordinary speech, however, we often make statements having both appraisive and descriptive significance (Austin 1962).
6. Familiar from the television series *Star Trek*, the Vulcan mind-meld is a fictional capacity of certain extra-terrestrials to tap directly into the thoughts of other life forms, and interact 'mind upon mind' without the mediation of natural language.
7. Stanley Cavell makes a similar point about philosophically skeptical revisions of ordinary language: '... the philosophers words must (or must seem to) be used in their normal way, otherwise they would not conflict with what should ordinarily be meant in using them; and [yet] ... the philosophers words cannot be used in (quite) their normal way, otherwise the ordinary facts, examples, and considerations he adduces would not yield a general skeptical conclusion' (1976: 60).
8. The Aalborg Project was an award winning but sorely disappointing Danish effort at rational, democratic and environmentally responsible city planning.
9. Here again I am in substantial agreement with Ball's (1978) response to Oppenheim.
10. Jonathan Havercroft (2003) similarly sees competing theoretical grammars of liberty as presenting different 'aspects' of the terms ordinary range of meaning.

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democracy and violence. Indeed it is frequently the case that discourses of democracy are couched in ethical terms as the obverse of violence. Ironically, this trend is often most apparent where societies are either making a transition to democracy or where a process of conflict transformation is taking place. The limitations of these approaches for our understanding of violence and democracy will be outlined in this article through an examination of contemporary political developments in Northern Ireland.

Keywords: violence; democracy; Northern Ireland; reconciliation; terror

Nonviolent Political Action and the Limits of Consent

Iain Attack

The consent theory of power, whereby ruling elites depend ultimately on the submission, cooperation and obedience of the governed as their source of power, is often linked to debates about the effectiveness of non-violent political action. According to this theory, ruling elites depend ultimately on the submission, cooperation and obedience of the governed as their source of power. If this cooperation is withdrawn, then this power is undermined. Iain Attack outlines this theory and examines its strengths and weaknesses. Attack argues that incorporating the insights of other theories of power, such as Gramsci's theory of hegemony and Foucault's views on 'micro-power', can provide us with a more sophisticated understanding of both the effectiveness and the limits of nonviolent political action than the consent theory of power. Gramsci's contribution deepens the analysis in terms of our understanding of the origins of individual consent in the context of larger economic and political structures, while Foucault adds a different dimension, in that his micro-approach emphasizes the ubiquity and plurality of power, rather than its embodiment or reification in large-scale structures.

Keywords: consent; power; non-violent political action; submission; Foucault; Gramsci; hegemony; resistance

The Grammars of 'Power': Between Contestation and Mediation

Mark Rigstad

In light of the pragmatic aspirations of ordinary language philosophy, this essay critically examines the competing grammatical strictures that are often set forth within the theoretical discourse of 'power'. It

repudiates both categorically appraisive employments of 'power' and the antithetical urge to fully operationalize the concept. It offers an attenuated defense of the thesis that 'power' is an essentially contestable concept, but rejects the notion that this linguistic fact stems from conflict between antipodal ideological paradigms. Careful attention to the ordinary pragmatics of power-language evinces the prospects for integrating various context-specific aspects of power and mediating between traditionally divergent theoretical frameworks.

Keywords: power; operationalism; incommensurability; discourse analysis; ordinary language philosophy