

# Introduction: Conceptions of power and an overview

## What is power?

Bertrand Russell argued that *power* is to *politics* what *electricity* is to *physics*. Power essentially concerns energy: the energy that humans use to get things done (Russell 1938). Just like physical energy, such as electricity, it can be used virtuously or malignly, for the purposes of creating light or to electrocute someone as part of a death penalty.

Russell's energy conception accords with Robert Dahl's (1957) definition of power, which is expressed in terms of cause and effect: 'A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do' (Dahl 1957: 202–3). Rephrased in the language of cause and effect: A causes B to do something that B would not otherwise do.

The capacity of A to cause B to do something, which B would not otherwise, is linked to the potency of A. There are two sources of this potency. One is the physicality of A: electricity, tooth and claw; the other power source is a complex system of meaning and structure, which both A and B inhabit and which, usually, predates their interaction.

Since Aristotle's (1941) *Politics*, political systems have been defined in terms of power structures. The virtuous rule by one Aristotle termed monarchy, while the malign rule by one was tyranny. The virtuous rule by a few was aristocracy, while the malign rule was oligarchy. The virtuous rule by the majority was constitutional government, while its malign – or, more correctly, selfish – form was democracy. Social political power can take many forms and has both the capacity for good or evil. In everyday speech, when we use the concept 'power', there is a tendency to equate it with its malign form. However, this is not inherent to social and political power.

One of the most influential definitions of power was Max Weber's, expressed as follows: "Power" (*Macht*) is the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will

despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests' (Weber 1978: 53). There are issues with translation here because *Macht* has a narrower, more coercive focus than the English word *power*. However, this definition has influenced the power debates towards a normatively negative appraisal of power, as something malign, coercive and dominating (see Lukes 2005: 83–85; Lukes in Hayward and Lukes 2008; Morriss 2002: xiv). Hence, the assumed focus is on the power that the powerful exercise over the less powerful, to the detriment of the latter.

When power is viewed as normatively negative the implicit agenda concerns how to get rid of power, as some malign tumor that should be excised. However, as we shall see from a more sociological orientation, there is no getting rid of power; it is ubiquitous.

In my experience, the negative view of power, as domination, resonates with the everyday speech usage of the concept of power. In everyday conversation, when people ask me what my academic specialism is and I answer *social and political power*, the follow-on question frequently concerns the evils of Stalin or Hitler or the wisdom of Lord Acton's adage that 'power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely' (Dalberg-Acton 1887).

In contrast to the above, in the academic literature there is also a view of power in terms of empowerment. Working in the republican normative tradition, Hannah Arendt is the most notable political philosopher to concern herself with power in normatively positive forms, analyzing what virtuous forms of power might look like (Arendt 1970 and 1998). Working on an empirical level, in sociology Talcott Parsons (1963) was the first exponent of the power-as-empowerment position. He compares power to money as a facility for action. This was followed by the work of Barry Barnes (1988), who integrates the work of Thomas Kuhn with sociological theory to argue that power represents some kind of epistemic consensus. In social philosophy, John Searle (1996 and 2007) has developed a view of power as capacity for action, which is similar to Barnes' perspective.

With the exception of Arendt and Morriss (2002), in mainstream political philosophy, especially in liberal political theory, there has been a remarkable absence of attention to power in its normatively positive, or virtuous, forms. This is partly because power is assumed to be malign. Power is characterized as the opposite of freedom. Freedom from power, or negative freedom (Berlin 2010), is considered a condition of possibility of emancipation. This negative view of power is paradigmatically exemplified by the title of an article by Philip Pettit: 'Freedom as Antipower' (Pettit 1996).

To return to our observation that power is energy, if freedom is to be more than the freedom of Robinson Crusoe (before Friday arrived), if humans are to be more than simple tool-making animals, then freedom also entails the joint capacity for action, or social energy, that is derived from being part of

political society. Indeed if freedom entails not just the right to do something but also the capacity to do it, then power is a condition of possibility for freedom (Morriss 2009). In Arendt's felicitous turn of phrase, power is the capacity to act in 'concert' (Arendt 1970: 44; see also Haugaard 2015). If this is correct, then political theorists should think about what normatively desirable power might look like, rather than wishing it away.

Several authors have argued that power should be considered as a *capacity* concept. The first to do so was probably Spinoza, who saw it as *potentia* (Saar 2010), which he conceptualizes as the potency of a person. Similarly, the contemporary analytic philosopher Peter Morriss has argued that power constitutes a capacity concept that refers to a person's ability or 'ableness' to do something (Morriss 2002: 80). Stewart Clegg (1989) argues that power is both an episodic (momentary) and dispositional concept, the latter indicating capacity for action. The flipside of power as domination is power as empowerment. As we shall see, most exercises of power (excluding slavery) entail some level of empowerment. In fact, dominating power is usually parasitic upon the empowering aspects of power relations. To take a simple example: when an exploited person works for another without overt signs of resistance, one explanation for acquiescence (there are many others, including 2-D structural constraint, 3-D cognitive bias and 4-D ontological predispositions) is that they have an immediate desire (or need) for the empowerment (including a wage and collective membership) that this relationship offers. So, in such a case domination is fused with empowerment.

To cover some of these usages, Amy Allen (1999) developed a distinction between *power-to*, *power-with* and *power-over*. As a dispositional concept, potential, or ableness, implies an emphasis upon *power-to*, while the more dominating view entails *power-over*. If we speak about 'black power' or 'women's power' the emphasis is upon the empowerment of these groups. As a collective group they create *power-with*. However, while this is all emancipating, this *power-with* and *power-to* may manifest itself in the capacity to exercise *power-over* others (Morriss 2002: 33). The *power-over* that social movements have is a consequence of their *power-to*. This has led Pamela Pansardi (2012) to argue that, contrary to everyday usage, *power-to* is the primary concept, and *power-over* the derivative one. With respect to the supposed opposition between freedom and power, if we take freedom to entail the *power-to* realize our desire, then power, as ability, becomes a condition of possibility of freedom, rather than its opposite (Morriss 2009).

As the above illustrates, once we move beyond the overarching perception that power is energy, the concept differentiates into many forms. The joint capacity for action, which Arendt, Parsons, Morriss and Pansardi have in mind, and the insidious power of Joseph Stalin are both forms of power.

Both virtuous republics and the Gulags are essentially power machines, which generate social power for different ends but, as we shall see, often using similar methods. It would be neat if we could separate these forms of power into different entities. However, social life is not that tidy because both enabling and dominating aspects of power often have similar bases and much of the time are operative simultaneously. As we shall see, there are deep theoretical reasons for this, as most forms of domination entail, and are parasitic upon, modes of empowerment.

At this point I do not wish to provide a further overview of the power debates. Rather, I wish to discuss what this diversity tells us about the concept of power. For the reader who wishes to have a short overview of the power debates, I have written such a survey in *The Encyclopedia of Political Thought* (Haugaard 2014) and in collaboration with Kevin Ryan (Haugaard and Ryan 2012: chapter 2). However, this background is not required. Some readers who find conceptual analysis tedious may wish to skip what follows down to the subheading ‘The four dimensions in brief’ or they may wish start with Chapter 1.

### **Power as an essentially contested concept**

The multiplicity of meaning of power has led some theorists, most notably Steven Lukes (1974 and 2005) and William Connolly (1983 [1974]), to argue that power is an *essentially contested concept*. The idea of essentially contested concepts comes from a well-known article by Walter B. Gallie (1956) in which he argued that many concepts, such as *democracy*, *art* and *Christian*, are somehow inherently resistant to agreed definition. The reason that they are essentially contested is that they appear analytic but are inherently evaluative. For instance, if we term something a *democracy*, or *art* as opposed to *craft*, or an action is characterized as *Christian* (in character), these are not simply statements of fact. They constitute a positive normative endorsement of something. Conversely, according to Lukes (2005; Hayward and Lukes 2008), if we say that someone is subject to power, this implies a negative normative evaluation to the effect that they are dominated or that their interests are thwarted.

In arguing that power is an essentially contested concept, Lukes was moving in the right direction, in the sense that he was moving us away from any overarching essentialist claims to a singular correct definition of power. While Lukes’ position has certain strengths, it does not go far enough in my opinion. First, supposedly *essentially* contested concepts are not actually inherently evaluative, as claimed – only so within specific language games. Second, this view does not emphatically ditch the idea that

there should be a singular definition of power; rather, it claims that there is one but we will never be able to agree on what it is.

Dealing with the first point (and the second later), while it is true that for normative political theorists power is perceived of as normatively evaluative, I do not think that appraisal of normativity inherent to the concept. In fact, many of the concepts that Gallie considers essentially contested are only contested in certain contexts or within what I will later term language games. For instance, the supposedly essentially contested signifier *Christian* is only positively evaluative among Christians who (rather narcissistically) tend to assume it is a *good thing* to be a Christian. To an atheist or agnostic sociologist/political scientist/anthropologist, *Christian* is simply a descriptor, without any normative connotation, positive or negative.

In social science, part of our work involves taking concepts that are used with normative connotations in everyday speech and stripping them of those connotations, viewing them, as dispassionately as we can, as empirical facts. The paradigm instance of this can be found in the first explicitly sociological study: Durkheim's 1897 *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* (Durkheim 1989). At the time, everyone assumed that suicide was a terrible thing, which any social scientist would wish to condemn. Durkheim shocked his contemporary readers by talking about societies as being more or less *developed* at suicide (Durkheim 1989: 160) or groups having greater/lesser *aptitude* or *talent* for suicide than others (for instance, Durkheim 1989: 155). By using normally positive terms (developed, aptitude and talent) in combination with suicide he was making the point that as a sociologist he was not viewing suicide normatively, as a blight to be cured. Rather, Durkheim viewed suicide dispassionately as a social fact (Durkheim 1982).

Another instance of non-evaluative usage is early sociologists' fascination with understanding what was unique about *modern* society. At that time, in everyday speech *modern* was a term of commendation. In that language game *modern* was opposed to *backward* or *primitive*. However, *modern* is not *essentially* normative. Part of learning the practice of the discipline of sociology was (and is) learning to use *modern* in a purely analytic sense, methodologically bracketing (or putting aside) normative connotations. Of course, in certain instances, even great sociologists such as Weber and Parsons slip into using the term *modern* normatively. However, within the discipline such usage is regarded as a lapse, as a failure to live up to the standards of the discipline (no doubt I lapse, too).

In this work, power is analyzed both empirically (without normative connotations) and also normatively, and the switch of language game will be clearly signaled. Generally speaking, I begin with non-normative usage, understanding how power works, before making any normative

evaluation. The latter will be interdependent on the former – it will be possible to accept my empirical theory and reject my normative conclusions, but not the other way around.

As a qualification, of course, it must be acknowledged that normative usage frequently slips into what purport to be empirical statements. As we shall see, one of the techniques of domination is precisely to present something as empirical that is really normative. However, that point conceded, this is not an either/or phenomenon. Statements are more or less normative; therefore, it possible to be more or less evaluative – a point I will later return to.

### Power as a family resemblance concept

As I have argued elsewhere at greater length (Haugaard 2010), Ludwig Wittgenstein's characterization of *family resemblance concepts* is better suited to the purpose of making sense of the usage of the concept of power than essentially contested concepts. Family resemblance concepts are analogous to the members of a family, with overlapping characteristics – John has the nose of his mother and the sense of humour of his father etc. Wittgenstein used the word *game* to explain family resemblance concepts (Wittgenstein 1967: § 66). We might say that all games entail winning and losing, yet a solitary child bouncing a ball is also playing a game, which has no winning or losing. To take a different example, at this moment I am sitting at a *table*. However, in a short while I intend to go sailing, so I am about to check the time of high tide using a tide *table*. I doubt that any definition can cover both usages of *table*.

I would categorize the social and political power family as gesturing at social and political energy, as in Russell (1938). In turn, this subdivides into a cluster of family resemblance concepts that have overlapping synergies and characteristics. The family-wide concept explains little in itself, as it is too wide and vague. Rather, the kind of construct required by sociological and normative theory is one focused on power concepts, including: coercion, the exercise of power, power resources, authority, power-over, power-to and power-with, and the various dimensions of power.

### Language games and conceptual tools

Closely associated with Wittgenstein's (1967) view of *family resemblance concepts* are the ideas of *language games* and words considered as *conceptual tools*. Essentially, one should not think of a language as a singular phenomenon. Rather, languages are made up of micro systems of meaning that have their own systemic form within the larger linguistic system.



The meaning of words is relationally constituted. If you take chess as a local language within other systems of meaning, the meaning of the word *queen* is relationally constituted relative to the words *king*, *bishop*, *knight*, *castle* and *pawn*. A game of chess constitutes a local language game. The meanings of the words in chess have some resemblance to everyday usages, for instance: as with reference to a feudal kingdom, so in chess, the *king* and *queen* are the most important pieces. Yet, knowledge of feudal politics will not inform you precisely how the *king* and *queen* move in chess.

In everyday life, we are continually part of local language games in which words gain a qualified, or specific, meaning relative to a local way doing things. This is not simply between dialects of the same language but also within small groups. Even small social units, such as families, frequently have jokes among themselves, which presuppose shared local meanings, or local language games. Similarly, specialist groups develop their own local language that serves specific purposes for them. Within the latter language games, words should be thought of as conceptual tools, specifically developed for the pragmatic purpose of getting a job done. Local language games within families and other collectives serve the purpose of signaling collective belonging, which is a different phenomenon.

The paradigm instance of the development of a local language game and conceptual tools is to be found in the square-rigged sailing ships of yesteryear. These ships were immensely complex and, especially towards the end of the days of sail, hugely under-crewed in order to compete with the new technology of steam propulsion – it is ironic that the end of the age of sail produced some of the greatest and most disciplined sailors of all time. Learning to be a crewmember of such a ship was not simply a task of learning the correct set of the sails; it also entailed being able to respond accurately to an order given. In order to accomplish that task a precise language was developed. This language was every bit as much part of the tools of the trade as the knife and marlinspike, which every sailor carried in their pocket. They were conceptual tools, analogous to physical tools.

Just like the physical tools, of which the ship itself was the largest (a ship is a sailing tool or sailing machine), over the centuries, these conceptual tools changed to become more fit for purpose. It was not that there was one correct meaning that they found, or some hidden essence. Rather, relations between signifier (word) and signified (referent) were constantly adapted to produce more precise conceptual tools. For instance, the signifier *starboard* came from the Viking ships that had a steering oar (literally, a steering board) on the right-hand side of the ship, which was always kept away from a quay wall to protect it from damage. The other side of the ship, the left, went alongside and was used for loading. In Danish the verb to load is *lade* (literally, to laden), so the left was the loading side, or *ladebord*,

which became *larboard* in English. Logical as this was, *larboard* and *starboard* shouted upwind in a howling gale were relatively indistinguishable to the ear. Therefore, by order of the British Admiralty, in 1867, *larboard* officially became *port*, which still suggested the loading side but had a different sound. The change to the word *port* constitutes, in essence, the creation of a new conceptual tool, replacing the now obsolete conceptual tool *larboard*, in much the same way that the introduction of physical tools (such as halyard winches) was an improvement. In a language game, words are conceptual tools, and their worth is judged by their usefulness. The same applies here. As we shall see later, in the analysis of 3-D power, thinking of words as conceptual tools has significant theoretical implications for the everyday assumption that convention equates to arbitrariness. If some conventions can be said to be better (for getting a job done) than others, they are far from arbitrary.

Thinking of words as conceptual tools renders essentialist debates on *the correct definition* of power, or power-related concepts, totally beside the point. *There is no general definition of power that is better than all others.* Claiming that *I have the best general definition of power* is as absurd as claiming that I have just invented *the best* carpenter's tool. For this reason any suggestion of a best definition of power must be abandoned. There are *saws*, *drill-bits* and *chisels* all of different sizes and shapes, each developed for a specific task. However superbly made a *chisel* or *drill-bit* may be, it does not qualify as *the best, or essence, of all tools*. The same goes for conceptual tools associated with power. The point is that what makes a tool useful is whether it is fit for purpose. Do these conceptual tools aid understanding or do they confound it? If the latter, then change them, just as the sailors of old replaced *larboard* with *port*.

A local language game is a way of throwing certain features of social life into relief by developing use-particular conceptual tools. This language game is a linguistic system, within the larger language. Chess is a largely self-contained language game in which each piece refers to the other and to the rules of the game. Most everyday language games are not as perfectly self-referential as chess, but even so, they have a self-referential systemic quality. The vocabulary of the sailing ship was a language game aimed at providing conceptual tools for managing the ship efficiently, which was a local language game largely known to sailors. Of course, some of the words of that language game are part of wider usage. However, the full nuances and implications of the language game of sailing were only appreciated by these disciplined and expert sailors.

In any academic discipline there is a conceptual vocabulary that goes with a paradigm or specific theory. Within these language games definitions are not right or wrong relative to a final-vocabulary-out-there. There is no



holy grail of the essence of things-in-themselves. Rather, there are local definitions that are evaluated relative to their effectiveness within that language game. What matters is internal consistency, usefulness, clarity and, in the final instance, the usefulness of the language game as a whole. What is the language game for? Why do we need this set of conceptual tools? These are the types of questions that we should focus upon, not what is the essence of power.

To take an instance: in the next chapter, while discussing one-dimensional power, I will distinguish between political power and violence. Echoing some of the ideas of Arendt (1970), I argue that physical violence usually is a sign of the loss of political power and so, in a sense, they are opposites, which is an observation Arendt was often criticized for (for instance, Breen 2007). Similarly, in a special issue of the *Journal of Political Power* (11(1)) on Forst's theory of noumenal power (Forst 2014 and 2017), Pablo Gilabert (2018) takes Forst to task for opposing power and violence. To simplify Forst's theory, political power requires justification to ensure compliance, while violence does not. However, these criticisms make the mistake of thinking that there is some kind of essence to either power or violence. The better way of thinking about this is in terms of the language game being developed and the usefulness of the conceptions as conceptual tools. With regard to my or Forst's claimed distinction between power and violence, the question should not be: have Forst or Haugaard missed the essence of power or violence? Rather, it should be: is this a useful distinction that enables the reader to understand the particular sociological or normative explanation of the nature of social and political power that Forst or Haugaard are constructing? Or, put more simply: does this distinction enable Forst or Haugaard to accomplish the tasks they wish to?

I can well imagine a different language game in which the power/violence distinction does not make sense. For instance, a theorist may wish to construct a language game where power equates to *having an effect* on someone. Within this language game, to say that violence is not power appears absurd. Violence is one of the biggest effects one person can have on another; they can use violence to kill someone – Pablo Gilabert makes this point with regard to Forst (Gilabert 2018). So it follows that violence is the ultimate form of political power. I would not disagree with the logic of this, or say that this use of concepts is categorically *wrong*. Rather, I simply assert that this is not the language game I or Forst are engaged with.

As we shall see, the reason that I wish to distinguish social and political power from simple violence has to do with understanding the relationship between power that is based upon some level of *consent* and power that does not presuppose any consent. I wish to understand the difference between coercive domination and domination based upon phenomena such as

authority and reification. In order to do so, I require political power and violence as different referents. To be clear, this is not a transcendental claim about the true essence of things; it simply reflects the need that I have for particular conceptual tools designed for a particular task of understanding.

The main danger of these local usages is the hazard of switching language game while not being aware that the same signifier, or word, has changed referent. Thus we are not speaking about the same thing. For instance, when a social theorist such as Parsons uses the term *power*, the referent is *power-to*, while for Weber the referent for power is *power-over* or *power as domination*. For this reason it is important to be specific in usage, to write about *power-to* and *power-over* (or *domination*), and avoid the temptation to make one of these referents just *power* in general. Equally, it is important to be aware, and to signal, when language games are being switched.

In what follows, my language game also includes local usage with regard to gendered pronouns. Rather than using both at once (*he* and *she*) or combinations (*s/he*), I use both singly. In other words, I sometimes use a female-gendered pronoun and at other times a male. I have adopted this convention for two reasons. First, I find the use of both or the made-up combination linguistically clumsy. Second, it is useful to be gender-specific in describing an interaction because there are two or more actors involved. If the powerful actor, A, is one gender and the less-powerful, B, is another, it is clearer who is the referent once we slip into gendered pronouns. I have not counted the numbers of gendered pronouns but my guesstimate (and intention) is that the number is roughly equal.

Another aspect of the local language game of this book is that from now on the four dimensions of power will generally be referred to using an abbreviated form, as follows: 1-D, 2-D, 3-D and 4-D.

### The normative and empirical language games

In the power literature the two most significant language games are the *empirical* and the *normative* language games. Examining power as an *empirical* phenomenon is different from claims concerning when is it *right* or *wrong* to exercise power. Speaking generally, the former is a sociological concern, while the latter is a normative one, or a concern of political theory.<sup>1</sup>

In the power literature the two claims are frequently not separated, which leads to confusion. For instance, in a review of the second edition of *Power: A Radical View*, which is a book I admire, I argue (Haugaard 2008a) that Lukes conflates the two language games. Lukes stated that power is not reducible to individual decisions and nondecisions and entails the 'social structured and culturally patterned behaviour of groups, and practices

of institutions, which may indeed be manifested by individual's inaction' (Lukes 2005: 27). In that context Lukes approvingly quotes Marx's adage about people making history but not in circumstances of their choosing (Lukes 2005: 26). Yet, later in the same book and, with greater emphasis, in his well-known exchange with Clarissa Rile Hayward, Lukes insists that power entails agency because 'there is a link between power and responsibility: ... part of *the point* of locating power is fixing responsibility ...' (Lukes in Hayward and Lukes 2008: 7).

Lukes is a highly acute sociological and normative theorist, so how does this apparent contradiction arise? The former is a sociological empirical claim while the latter is a normative one. It is a *sociological* claim that the most significant power effects are not reducible to intentional agency. Rather, they entail structured contexts of social action, including the unintended effects of the action of past generations. However, in the language game of normative and moral theory, responsibility is key. For instance, at the Nuremberg Trials could-have-done-otherwise agency implied *guilt*, while a convincing-structural-constraint response suggested *innocence*. If the local language game includes fixing moral responsibility to power, then the structured context of action does not constitute power. Thus, there are two language games, which are incommensurable.

While it is essential to separate empirical and normative claims, to know which is which, it is also important to realize that the problems of these language games are mutually dependent. Normative theory without sociology (*ought* without *is*) is like attempting to do biology without physics and chemistry. A normative account of how power should be without understanding how power is created in the social system will only have limited usefulness, as the normative recommendations will bear little relationship to the conditions of possibility of actual societies. I suspect that this is the reason that there is a radical disjuncture between the practice of politics and some of the nuanced debates of political philosophers.

I start with sociological theory and conclude with normative theory. The sociological theory section is much longer, eight chapters, than that of the normative theory, which is confined to the last and concluding chapter. The reason for this is practical, as I had already reached book length with the former. I intend to write another normative book after this and I hope that the single normative chapter will indicate to readers the significant implications of the sociological analysis.

Another qualifier with regard to local usage is that I oppose *normative theory* to *sociological theory*, rather than use the word *social theory*. My reason for using *sociological theory* in place of *social theory* (or social philosophy) is that in everyday usage *social theory* can be normative, while *sociological theory* is not. Otherwise, the two are used interchangeably.

### A qualification on *is* and *ought*

In drawing the sharp distinction between a sociological language game and a normative language game, I am assuming that it is possible to distinguish *is* from *ought*. In making this distinction I am going against certain fashionable contemporary trends. Critical realists and most postmodernists would claim that is not possible to separate the empirical and the normative, which is a claim that I concede has some truth to it. However, this observation is not an analytic claim; rather, it is one concerning the difficulties of *practice*. When thinking about how power is practised, it can sometimes be difficult to methodologically bracket normative perceptions. However, distinguishing between the normative and the empirical should not be considered an all-or-nothing phenomenon.

Even if it may not be possible to expunge every vestige of normative bias from sociological theory, it is possible to try your best to keep both kinds of claims separate, which is not an all-or-nothing phenomenon. Rather, normative and empirical claims should be considered as on a scale. The claim that ‘the cat sat on the mat’ is usually an empirical claim, and ‘act according to moral precepts that can be universalized’ is usually a normative one. That said, ‘the cat sat on the mat’ can have normative connotations within a specific context – maybe cats should (or should not) be sitting on mats? Furthermore, the statement ‘the cat sat on the mat’ uttered by a devoutly religious believer in some Ancient Egyptian ritual of cat worship could have strong normative connotations – it could be a divine sign of great moral provenance. However, in normal circumstances, ‘the cat sat on the mat’ would contrast with the normative injunction ‘act according to moral precepts that can be universalized’. Again, while the latter is largely a normative claim, when giving substance to specific acts, this normative injunction has empirical content. The latter conceded, I would still argue that ‘the cat sat on the mat’ and the injunction ‘act according to moral precepts that can be universalized’ usually fall at different ends of a scale. In most contexts the former is close to the ideal, or pure, type of an empirical claim, while the latter is a predominantly normative one.

As we shall see, as the book develops, I am generally hostile to binary thinking, replacing binary either/or thinking with scalar both/and-type thinking. I fully accept that it is impossible to bracket normative considerations *entirely*, in binary fashion, so that a statement is a pure *is* or pure *ought* statement. However, if we think on a scale, where statements are more or less normative, there is a significant difference between normative and empirical claims. With a certain conscious level of analytic rigour and methodological bracketing, it is possible to make empirical theoretical claims about the *is* workings of power, which are qualitatively different

from any normative accounts of how we think power should, or should not, be constituted. As we shall see later, in the analysis of 4-D power, it is precisely the capacity to make such distinctions that is central to modern proliferation of *disciplines*, both as subject areas and as a social subject predisposition.

### Overall conceptualization of power

This book is structured around a conceptualization of power in four dimensions. These dimensions are inspired by Lukes' (1974) account of the power debates in three dimensions, with re-theorized aspects of Michel Foucault's work added as the fourth dimension, which follows Peter Digeser's (1992) suggested combination of Lukes and Foucault. In addition, my approach incorporates much of the work of more consensual power theorists (including Hannah Arendt, Barry Barnes, Peter Morriss and John Searle), wider sociological theory (especially Jeffrey Alexander, Pierre Bourdieu, Émile Durkheim, Ernest Gellner, Anthony Giddens, Norbert Elias and Max Weber), philosophy (including J. L. Austin, William James, Thomas Kuhn, John Searle and Ludwig Wittgenstein), psychology (especially Erik Erikson and Stanley Milgram) and normative political theory (among others Rainer Forst, Jürgen Habermas, Phillip Pettit, Richard Rorty and John Rawls). To this I have added many years of my own musings upon the subject. As a result, the four dimensions of power as theorized here are significantly different from the manner theorized by Lukes or in the work of Foucault.

For the reader who is unfamiliar with the power debates, and wishes to familiarize themselves with them, I refer them to Haugaard (2014) and Haugaard and Ryan (2012). However, what follows can be read without this background. I would ask readers who are familiar with the debates not to skip over the chapters on any of the dimensions, including the first and second, because I handle them differently from any previous theories – including my own previous work. Obviously, they may wish to skip the synopsis immediately below.

### The four dimensions in brief

All four dimensions of power are ideal types. They constitute lenses that render certain perspectives of reality visible. The designation of dimensions of power constitutes a way of understanding particular aspects of power, while momentarily methodologically bracketing the other dimensions.

While I have just suggested that the four dimensions of power are complex in their detail, it is possible to conceptualize them in general terms

relatively simply. I propose to do this, so the reader has a sense of where she is going. Viewed sociologically, the four dimensions of power each respectively focus upon *agency* (1-D), *structure* (2-D), *system of thought* (3-D) and *social ontology* (4-D).

In his seminal 1957 article on political power, Dahl describes 1-D agency power in the following terms:

suppose a policeman is standing in the middle of an intersection at which most traffic ordinarily moves ahead; he orders all traffic to turn right or left; the traffic moves as he orders it to do. Then it accords with what I conceive to be the bedrock idea of power ...

(Dahl 1957: 202)

In 1-D the focus is upon the momentary exercise of power, in which one actor makes another do something that they would not otherwise (Dahl 1957: 203), which was the perspective that interested Dahl most. 1-D is agent-centred and posits a direct causal relationship between two or more social agents, while the external structural conditions of possibility are taken as given.

While the intended emphasis is upon 1-D in the above example, in fact, all four dimensions of power are present. The 1-D aspect refers to the exercise of power by the police officer, which makes the driver do something that she would not otherwise do – turn right instead of left, or vice versa. The 2-D aspect refers to the social structures that make a police officer a *police officer*, with certain dispositional powers, which are reproduced every time there is compliance. If the driver does not comply, then there is 2-D structural conflict. 3-D refers to the tacit social knowledge that the driver and police officer share. The driver imposes the concept of *traffic police* upon someone wearing a particular hat or uniform, and in so doing it appears reasonable for her to comply. If the driver thinks of the police officer as having an absolute right to command, there is reification involved. The 4-D aspect refers to the internalized self-discipline necessary for drivers routinely to obey the highway code, which includes compliance with the demands of traffic police, even when the driver may not wish to do so. As we shall see, a driver with the temperament of a feudal knight would probably cut the police officer's head off.

In most social interaction all four dimensions of power are present, even if we choose to focus upon them one at a time. In this language game, the word *dimensions* is used analogously to the way we use the word to describe the four perspectives of the plans of a house. It is meaningful and informative to break the house into a *plan*, *front* and *back elevations* and two *end elevations* – four dimensions. Just because we focus momentarily upon



the *plan* does not mean that the other dimensions have vanished into thin air. The plan gives us specific information about the house, which the other dimensions do not. Yet, we do not really understand the house just from focusing upon the plan. While we look at each aspect singly, full understanding comes from first separating and then combining all four aspects or dimensions.

### Overview of the structure of the book

With regard to the first dimension of power, in Chapter 1, I include both power-over, as in Dahl, with power-to, as in Arendt (1970), Allen (1999) and Morriss (2002). By combining them I develop an account of conflict that lies on a scale from coercion to consensual legitimacy. This includes an account of performative authority, as foundational to agency, derived from Austin (1975), Alexander (2010), Searle (1996) and Weber (1978). In understanding everyday authority I explore it by its absence through the analysis of Primo Levi's experiences in Auschwitz (Levi 1991). 1-D authority emerges as empowerment and domination within the system. On the second dimension of power, in Chapter 2, I follow Bachrach and Baratz (1962 and 1963) in emphasizing bias. However, I add the category of structural conflict, which changes the essence of this dimension significantly. The latter is based upon a development of Giddens' (1984) theory of structuration and my own work (Haugaard 1992 and 1997) on structural reproduction. I argue that structural reproduction is interactive, thus with two possible reactions by others, confirm-structuration or destructuration. Structural conflict makes 2-D a significantly more radical conflict than 1-D. In Chapter 3, I bring the first and second dimension of power into dialogue. I argue that 1-D conflict and 2-D conflict are significantly different, and that the creation of systems entails moving from deep 2-D conflicts to shallower 1-D conflicts. This includes an account of various forms of resistance, including passive resistance, and revolutions.

With regard to the third dimension of power, in Chapter 4, I drop the idea of false-consciousness, which is replaced by consciousness-raising. To this are added theories of paradigms and epistemes, from Kuhn (1970 and 1977) and Foucault (1970 and 1989), respectively. By refracting this against Austin (1975), what counts as *knowledge* emerges as performatively felicitous reasoned justification. In Chapter 5, I develop the third dimension of power to include reification, the distinction between the sacred and profane (as influenced by Alexander 2010). This includes a critique of the popularly held belief, which has been hugely influential in many fields, including postmodernism and modern art, that the conventional nature

of structures renders them arbitrary, which is not the case. In Chapter 6, I engage with Truth (with a capital T) as reification, which includes a playful critique of Descartes characterized as a theologian, rather than as a philosopher. The latter is done while maintaining a theory of truth. This is intended as a clarification and re-theorization of Foucault's theory of power/knowledge/truth (Foucault 1980 and 1994), combined with Kuhn (1970 and 1977) and the earlier theory of knowledge in terms of performative success.

In Chapter 7, I discuss the fourth dimension as the social construction of social subjects, which is influenced by Elias (1995), Erikson (1995), Garfinkel (1984), Giddens (1984), Foucault (1979) and Milgram (2010a and 2010b). From Erikson, Garfinkel, Giddens and Milgram, I develop the concept of ontological security as core to 4-D. Using Elias and Foucault as correctives to each other, I look at modes of internalization of self-restraint, as both enabling and constraining, in both fields of knowledge and politics. As observed by Elias, in a complex system of interdependence internalized restraint replaces external coercion, which I argue is key to democratic politics. However, as observed by Foucault, this self-restraint has dominating aspects. Overall, new forms of 4-D have significant implications for the extent and nature of violence in contemporary society. In Chapter 8, I explore the social construction of social subjects in extreme situations, including social death. 4-D is theorized with respect to slavery and solitary confinement, which is influenced by the work of Patterson (1982) and Guenther (2013).

The last chapter is normative and is significantly different from any current normative perspectives in political theory. It is based upon an understanding of how power works and the orientation is pragmatist. What defines *ought* is evaluated relative to the question: what are power structures for? In particular: what are liberal-democratic power structures for? I argue that most normative theorists think in a binary way, dividing the world into oppressors and oppressed. They assume that power is zero-sum, which constitutes a profound theoretical mistake. I argue for a scalar theory of power, where the dual empowering and dominating aspects of power play a crucial role. Key to the theory is the idea of normative desirability as positive-sum power, which respects all social actors as ends in themselves. Most systems are more or less desirable, while normative theories seeking perfection, inspired by imagined utopias (see Cooke 2006), violate what we know about the nature of social and political power. Consequently, utopian thinking invariably leads to totalitarian nightmares. Similarly, reifying discourses including, for instance, appeals to the *will of the people* – current in populist politics (Muller 2016) – also have normatively undesirable qualities. In contrast, pragmatic sociologically informed

accounts of power entail an acceptance of imperfection and quest for balance that, ironically, in their lesser ambition, lead to better societies than more ambitious idealistic utopian and reifying visions.

### **Note**

- 1 Hindess (1995) observes this distinction but concludes that only normative analysis is interesting. As he does not explain why, this is left as a subjective preference, which is difficult to engage with theoretically.