

# Unity in Diversity? Power in World Politics.

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## **Abstract**

This paper reminds that 'power' is an essentially contested concept, with different interpretations held together more by a family resemblance than a core meaning, and that the meaning we choose determines which relations we consider relevant and where we locate political spaces. Suggesting that IR scholars have, exceptions aside, by and large shied away from a structured debate on the meaning of power, the paper reviews debates on 'power' in social and political theory along Steven Lukes' three dimensions and searches for their echoes in IR theory. It takes up Guzzini's point that every definition of 'power' is embedded in a broader theoretical frame and suggests that, consequently, IR cannot ignore theoretical debates when conceptualizing 'power' because the way we read 'power' into the international affects our understanding of both 'causation' and of 'politics'.

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## Introduction

‘What holds the world together at its core?’ This famous question is posed by Goethe’s *Faust*, who after years of tireless studying realizes that he still has not grasped the essence of ‘the world’. Frustrated with the limit of his own knowledge, he enters a pact with the devil in the hope to find the answer. Although scholars working in the field of International Relations (IR) generally do not harbour *Faust’s* ambitions the question of how to grasp ‘world politics’ remains a formidable challenge. Perhaps the most prominent and most enduring answer is to focus on ‘power’, that is, to conceive of the world of politics as one that is held together by power relations. This paper examines this answer and its implications by exploring the insight that focusing on ‘power’ does *not* provide analysts with an essence. As the specialized literature tells us, ‘power’ is an essentially contested concept, with different interpretations held together more by a family resemblance than a core meaning. The meaning we choose determines which relations we consider relevant and where we locate political spaces – in short, how we conceptualize ‘world politics’. Therefore, recognizing that it is pertinent to be aware of the different ways ‘power’ can be defined, this paper is an exercise in thinking about power in IR.

Thinking about power was long considered the domain of realism. Hans Morgenthau famously declared that, anchored in a human desire to dominate and/or the need for self-protection, “statesmen think and act in terms of interests defined as power” (Morgenthau’s 1960: 5) and that power is “the immediate aim” of all states (Ibid.: 27). Ever since, realist scholars successfully monopolized ‘power’ as an analytical device to make sense of international politics, defining it primarily in terms of military capabilities and used it for classifying states and explaining their behaviour. Ironically, attempts to establish alternative readings of international politics often reinforced this marriage. Exceptions aside, critics of realism generally gained their academic currency by either refining or rejecting realisms’ focus on power instead of forcefully articulating an *alternative* reading of it. For instance, in his *Social Theory of International Politics*, often considered the most important sociological treatise of IR theory, Alexander Wendt recognizes that the proposition of international politics being shaped by power relations “cannot be a *uniquely* realist claim”. Yet his promise to present an alternative understanding of “power constituted primarily by ideas and cultural contexts” rather than “brute material forces” remains unfulfilled (Wendt 1999: 97, emphasis in original). Wendt does not discuss the meaning of power, let alone provide a ‘rival’ conceptualization of it, but only offers a corrective for the neorealist reading.

Thus, while the past two decades produced significant discussions over the meaning of other core concepts of IR, such as security, or sovereignty, the so-called linguistic turn did not really spark much interest in debating ‘power’. Of course, there are a few IR scholars who have engaged the task of specifying and broadening the meaning of power, three of which have served as inspiration for this paper: David Baldwin’s repeated calls for paying closer attention to the concept used so often but

understood so poorly (Baldwin 1979; 1989; 2002), Cynthia Enloe's reminder for critically examining prevalent conceptions of power and moving attention to analytical silences (Enloe 1989; 1996), and Stefano Guzzini's writings which provide, in my view, the deepest and most differentiated reading of 'power' in the field (Guzzini 1993; 1998; 2000; 2006). Also, as will become clear over the course of the discussion, the alternative conceptions of power found in the 'silences' of the discipline are not new but mostly forgotten voices. To bring them back into memory in a structured manner, this paper attempts to present an overview of the debates about 'power' in social and political theory with a specific focus on how they echo in IR.

Doing so provides a critical complement to Baldwin's approach aimed at refining the measurement of power through contextual analysis and puts into perspective the discussion by Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall (2005a), which tries to systematically capture different conceptions of 'power' and explore connections between them. Although valuable in raising awareness of the richness and complexity of 'power', both sets of authors neglect the theoretical contexts in which the concept has been embedded. Most strikingly, their texts do not discuss the power debates in social and political theory, including the 'three faces', or 'three dimensions' as Steven Lukes (1974/2005) originally called them. Baldwin (2002: 179) openly states that this debate is of no importance to IR scholars, which could be explained with his belief that power is a phenomenon that can be measured with "increased precision" (Baldwin 1979: 162). In other words, the portrait of 'power' is not painted by theory and therefore cannot be modified by it. Taking the conceptual work of the 1950s Chicago school as his main point of reference, it appears that for Baldwin abstract theoretical debates at best are repetitions on the theme and at worst obscure the true nature of power.<sup>1</sup> Somewhat different, Barnett and Duvall only pretend to ignore the 'three faces'. Indeed, their dismissal of the debate on the ground that it lacks "elements of a systematic typology" (2005a, Fn 13) is peculiar because their own typology carries a striking similarity and is backed with references to its key-representatives (see below), and because one could assume to find clues here about the possibility for 'connecting' multiple conceptions of power. Barnett and Duvall also do not touch on the link between these conceptions and different ways of theorizing IR, which allows them to blend out that these connections may be difficult to establish across meta-theoretical divides.

The basic message emphasized in this paper, then, is that IR scholars cannot ignore theoretical debates when conceptualizing 'power'. Being aware of the work done in social and political theory not only serves as an inspiration and minimizes the risk of reinventing the wheel. Even more so, different concepts of power are embedded in different theoretical frames and everything that comes with it, including our understandings of 'causation' and of 'politics'. Moving towards this point, the remainder of this paper will give the topic some grounding by reviewing the definition of power in and around the writings of Max Weber. It will then adopt Lukes' typology of the three dimensions to

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<sup>1</sup> Telling is his critique of Waltz in Baldwin (1993, 2002).

trace conceptions of power found in political and social theory into IR. Here two caveats must be made: first, boxing the three dimensions with the familiar IR tripartite of realism, institutionalism/regime theory and constructivism/postmodernism is of course only one way of organizing the debate, and by no means a perfect one. As the learned reader will notice, insights and issues do cut across.<sup>2</sup> Second, despite the seeming temporal development in the narrative below, it is not intended to tell a story of theoretical progress. Rather, as Steven Lukes (2006: 164) reminds in response to his critics, the reader should keep in mind that every way of seeing is also a way of not seeing.

### **Foundations and Dimensions**

From Hobbes to Foucault, philosophers and social theorists have always found ‘power’ intertwined with the human condition, with Nietzsche suggesting that the feeling of power [Gefuehl der Macht], has become both the greatest love and a ‘demon’ to humans.<sup>3</sup> Contemporary writings most frequently refer to Max Weber, whose insights influenced a number of important works on ‘power’, including those of Robert Dahl, Hans Morgenthau, Raymond Aron, and Michael Mann.

Weber defined power, the German *Macht*, as the “opportunity [Chance] to have one’s will prevail [durchsetzen] within a social relationship, also against resistance, no matter what this opportunity is based on” (Weber 1976: 28, author’s translation).<sup>4</sup> This definition is remarkably rich. First, and most obviously, it points out that power is a relational phenomenon that cannot be grasped without first identifying a social relationship. Weber (1976: 13) defines a social relationship as a phenomenon where the meaning frame within which the individuals’ will is formed and behavior takes place is “mutually adjusted and oriented towards each other”. Hence, identifying whether and how individuals stand in a power relationship requires the identification of the meaning context, that is, a shared system of values. Second, as an opportunity, or potential, which does not have to be realized, the definition suggests that identifying power has much to do with identifying the position someone is placed in vis-à-vis others, which allows seeing power as both ‘capability’ and ‘effect’. Third, the qualification that meeting and overcoming resistance is not a necessary feature can be interpreted that power means accomplishing one’s will not only against but also with others, thus encompassing phenomena of both resistance and cooperation. Thus Weber also allows for the notion of empowerment, or ‘power to’, and leaves open the possibility that a power relationship is not necessarily hierarchical, as implied in the notion of ‘power over’. Although by making power a

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<sup>2</sup> For other perspectives in social theory, see Barry (1976); Morriss (2002); Haugaard (2002), and for IR see Baldwin (2002); Guzzini (1993); Barnett/Duvall (2005a, b).

<sup>3</sup> Nietzsche, *Morgenroete* (1881: 23, 262). For overviews of the treatment of power in Western thought, see Haugaard (2002), Lukes (2005a: 163-168).

<sup>4</sup> Many English texts use the translation found in Dahl, namely ‘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’. I find this translation problematic, for two reasons: (i) it understands the German *Chance* as ‘probability’ whereas Weber more likely meant ‘opportunity’ or ‘possibility’ and (ii) it ignores that Weber did not make overcoming resistance a necessity when he wrote “auch gegen Widerstreben” (Weber 1976: 28).

strictly social phenomenon his definition does not cover empowerment understood as individual development.

Weber is clear that the concept is amorphous. As he puts it, the position of having one's will prevail can arise due to "all thinkable human qualities and [in] all thinkable constellations" (Ibid). Weber spoke of different facets of power more specifically in the context of a particular phenomenon, namely that of *Herrschaft*. Usually translated into English as authority, domination, rule, or governance, *Herrschaft* is defined by Weber as "the opportunity to find obedience amongst specified persons for a given order" (Weber 1976: 28, author's translation). Such obedience, Weber suggests, is based on a belief in the legitimacy of the command motivated, more specifically, by rational cost-benefit calculation, custom, or personal affection.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, he argues, for *Herrschaft* to be considered legitimate, the relationship between the actor giving the order and the one following it must be 'institutionalized' (with institutions understood in a broad sense) in one of three types: (i) a legal or contractual arrangement in which both are members and are following agreed-upon rules, such as in a bureaucracy, (ii) a belief in tradition which designates clear hierarchies through stand/rank such as between the patriarch and the servant, (iii) the charismatic quality of the person issuing the order obtained, for instance, through extraordinary acts that create bonds of personal affection, such as between leader and disciple (Weber 1992: 151-166). In crude terms, these three types attribute the willingness to follow orders to a technical, a habitual, and an emotional relationship.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, and quite importantly, Weber's *Herrschaft* phenomenon describes ways of having one's will prevail without using force (physical violence) and, thus, describes power as a psychological phenomenon. This distinction between power as "civil obedience" (de Jouvenel 1952) and the application of physical violence is generally accepted among theorists, although most maintain that power remains linked to violence in one way or another (see below).<sup>7</sup> An interesting exception is Hannah Arendt, who makes a fundamental distinction between power and physical violence, noting that "out of the barrel of a gun grows the most effective demand, resulting in the most instant and perfect obedience. What can never grow out of it is power" (Arendt 1970: 51). This juxtaposition is informed by a conception of power that sits uneasily with Weber's definition of *Macht* and is formulated in opposition to his notion of *Herrschaft*. Rooted in an Aristotelian understanding of human nature, Arendt defines power as "the human ability not just to act but to act in concert"

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<sup>5</sup> Legitimacy is defined by Seymour Lipset as involving "the capacity of the system to engender and maintain the belief that the existing political institutions are the most appropriate ones for society" (cited in Kubik 1994: 8). It should be noted that, faithful to the ideal of a 'value free' social science, Weber's notion of legitimacy is not bound to a specific form of governance. Rather, he sought to outline different ideal-types of institutions in which orders were accepted. In this sense, it is a 'behavioural' perspective.

<sup>6</sup> Weber also outlines the limits for each power relationship, that is, the factors weakening the ability to command and willingness to abide in all three cases.

<sup>7</sup> The distinction is found in, for instance, de Jouvenel (1952); Morgenthau (1960); Lasswell and Kaplan (1950); Oppenheim (1976); Aron (1966); Hart (1976); Baldwin (1979).

(Arendt 1970: 44). While she echoes Weber's emphasis on power as a social phenomenon and its need for legitimacy – which, for Arendt, is derived from the group coming together – she does not see it as being expressed in obedience. Instead, Arendt sees power as *creative*, as something productive, as a phenomenon of empowerment emerging through togetherness exemplified in non-violent resistance movements.<sup>8</sup> This communal, or consensual, conception of power, also found in Parsons, shifts the focus away from Weber's emphasis on the 'prevailing will' to the extent that 'acting in concert' creates something new that has not been there before.

### ***The first dimension: winning conflicts***

When feeling tempted to specify 'power', IR scholars usually adopt Robert Dahl's definition of 'A getting B to do something B would otherwise not do' (Dahl 1961; 1968). Yet Dahl (like Baldwin) built on the work by Harold Lasswell and Morton Kaplan (1950), which reads like a transmission of some of Weber's conceptual insights to an American audience in the behavioral gown of the Chicago school. Like Weber, Lasswell and Kaplan understand power as a phenomenon of interpersonal relations. They define it as the production of intended effects on other persons, more precisely as A affecting B through the shaping and distribution of values within a shared "value pattern".

Lasswell and Kaplan further differentiate between 'power' and 'influence'. Whereas the former is understood as 'actual control' of shared value patterns under the threat of sanctions (Ibid, 76), influence is defined as a potential contained in a superior position and lacks the coercive character of 'power' (Ibid, 58f). While this view is shared by most scholars, there is disagreement over how to relate the two concepts. Lasswell and Kaplan treat 'power' as a subcategory of 'influence', whereas others see the two as analytically distinct (Mokken and Stokman, 1976; Morriss 2002), or treat 'influence' as a specific form of 'power' (Barry 1976; Oppenheim 1976; Baldwin 2002). Because deciding for one or the other position either narrows or expands the meaning of power, this is more than semantic bickering. Lasswell and Kaplan's narrower qualification of power as a coercive phenomenon presupposes conflicting interests and effectively defines power as winning conflict manifested in "observable acts", that is, in A's participation in the making of policy affecting B's values (Lasswell and Kaplan 1950, xiv). Stressing that the means allowing such control could be "many and varied", they follow Weber in emphasizing the importance of *context* for understanding power, arguing that analysts must take into account 'weight' (degree of participation in the decision), 'scope' (the values shaped), and 'domain' of power (the specific persons involved).

Robert Dahl complemented Lasswell and Kaplan's theoretical discussion by focusing on the measurement of 'power' in decision-making. He responded to voices in the late 1950s claiming that

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<sup>8</sup> However, when Arendt mentions Gandhi as an example, the dividing line between her understanding of power and Weber's *Herrschaft* becomes blurry, as Gandhi seems to fit quite comfortably with the notion of the charismatic leader. Hence, a Weberian phenomenon of *Herrschaft* could be seen as compatible with Arendt's notion of legitimacy in the moment of group formation.

American politics was dominated by a small group of elites and, criticizing the lack of empirical evidence behind this claim, he aimed at showing that ‘power’ was held more broadly (‘distributed pluralistically’) across society. To do so, his study sought to identify who was most successful in advancing preferences in a series of decisions in the community of New Haven. Adopting the emphasis on context, Dahl recorded conflicting preferences for the outcome of a given decision among the actors involved and then analyzed whose interests prevailed by recording successes and defeats (through vetoes) in these decisions (Dahl 1961). Although he did not provide new theoretical insights, Dahl’s study was valuable in sharpening analytical edge of power as a zero-sum game and fuelling the debate on ‘who governs’ (see also Polsby 1980).

The understanding of power as prevailing in observable conflict was and remains popular in IR scholarship. It resonates particularly well with the realist assumption of states as competing entities and of power as the ability to win wars. To be sure, as Brian Schmidt (2005) reminds, realist scholarship was never unified, or unidimensional, in its thinking about power. Yet from the complex (or: broader) discussions found in the writings of Carr (1945/2001), Morgenthau (1960), and Raymond Aron (1966), including the view that economic resources serve both as a prerequisite for military power and as a independent means of influence (Hart 1976, Gilpin 1981), to the simpler (or: narrower) views expressed by Kenneth Waltz (1979) and John Mearsheimer (2001), the realist baseline are military capabilities, and the relative distribution thereof the indicator for measuring ‘power’. Over time this bestowed IR with two truisms: first, assuming the primary indicator for power to be the ability to win wars, power relations among states designate positions of (in)security, that is, having power (or not) is synonymous with being safe (or not). As a result, power analysis is security analysis. Second, assuming the distribution of power to be a zero-sum game, the security dilemma turns ‘power to’ automatically into ‘power over’, as one states’ increase in military capabilities is perceived by other states as a potential for domination.

In the context of the Cold War arms races, the key question for many in IR was how to know which side would prevail in a conflict, specifically whether power lies in the possibility (potential) of using military instruments or in their actual use (exercise). This is closely related to the question whether power should be measured in terms of resources (properties) or outcomes (effects), and to what extent either can be measured objectively. Understanding power as control over resources leads to the question to what extent different ‘types’ of resources (e.g., industry, military, population size, etc) can be aggregated into a single indicator of ‘power’ and to what extent resources can be used effectively across policy realms. For those scholars agreeing on the importance of context and the low fungibility of power resources, operating with a ‘lump concept’ of power is of little analytical value (Baldwin 1979, 1989; Keohane and Nye 1977; Guzzini 1993). Furthermore, scholars have argued that the actor controlling resources also must have the will of using them, even suggesting that ‘will’ is a power resource in itself (Hart 1976: 290), although this point is rejected by realists emphasizing that states

(should) operate under the assumption of worst-case scenarios. Even more important, as scholars writing on deterrence have pointed out, defining power as control over resources runs the danger of losing sight of the relational dimension, specifically the fact that resources need to be recognized by others (Jervis 1976). Regardless of A's intentions, for there to be a power relationship B needs to be aware not only of the existence of A's resources but also needs to know that and how they could be used. In other words, for there to be a credible threat, resources and their potential effect must be communicated through, for instance, military parades or the 'testing' of weapons (Carr 2001: 103).

When the American experience in Vietnam demonstrated that a greater arsenal of military resources does not automatically translate into winning wars, scholars shifted towards an understanding of power as "control over outcomes" (Hart 1976). Yet here it is important how 'control' is being measured. If identified backwards from the outcome (winning the war), the argument quickly becomes tautological. This is most obvious in the problem of the 'freerider' or the 'benefit fallacy' also mentioned by Lukes, namely that just because A benefits from the outcome of the war does not mean that A had any influence in bringing victory about. Furthermore, as the latest Iraq war exemplifies, one must be careful of defining the 'outcome' by asking *when* conflict is actually won. And then there is the (somewhat problematic) argument that losing wars is not necessarily an indicator of weakness but merely a consequence of 'conversion failure', that is, of not fully using the resource available, which Baldwin (1979) calls the 'paradox of unrealized power'.<sup>9</sup> Given these problems of measuring power as 'war-winning ability', it is not surprising that some arguments central to realism remain slippery. Ambiguity bedevils not only the meaning and impact of 'polarity' (Guzzini 2006) but also the 'balance of power' proposition and the question whether and how balancing occurs, memorably captured by Ernst Haas (1953) and occupying scholars to this day (Little 1988; Levy 2002; Brooks and Wohlforth 2005).

### **The second dimension: limiting alternatives**

Dahl's approach of measuring power as who wins in a conflict was criticized most effectively by Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz (1962; 1970). They argued that the focus on the formal decision making process leaves out an important dimension of power because it does not take into account that decisions differ in their significance and, most importantly, that certain decisions may not take place at all. Thus, Bachrach and Baratz put forward a second dimension of power which involves the analysis of "non-decisions". More specifically, they suggested that power analysis has to address the question why some alternatives are not part of the debate and, consequently, who has the authority to exclude issues from the discussion. The answer lies in what has become known as agenda-setting power, namely the ability of actors "to create or reinforce barriers to the public airing of policy conflicts" (Bachrach and Baratz 1970: 8). In other words, power is exercised by actors who can

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<sup>9</sup> The 'conversion failure' argument is difficult to reconcile with the definition of power as winning conflicts. It is also dubious because it suggests that failure, such as through lacking 'political will', is ex-post fixable. Thanks to Stefano Guzzini for pointing this out.

mobilize the system-inherent bias ('rules of the game') built into institutions to their advantage and, thus, limit choice about which decisions can be taken.<sup>10</sup>

This dimension of power analysis puts more emphasis on structure. Rather than assuming a power relation as being two autonomous individuals facing each other and taking victory as indicator for identifying the powerful, it moves attention to how their environment structurally (dis)advantages one side. Differently said, whereas the previous dimension focuses on the direct relationship between A and B, here power works more indirectly through both being positioned in an institutional setting and the ability of A to influence this setting 'against' B. This observation can be found in the famous analyses of bureaucracies by Weber, Robert Michels, or Graham Allison, and also echoes in Michael Mann's notion of the states "infrastructural power" through controlling the provision of public goods and services (Mann 1993).

In IR, the second dimension can be found in the regime and institutionalist literature, as well as the literature on globalization. It emerged out of discussions surrounding the phenomenon of interdependence in the new field of International Political Economy (IPE) in the 1970s, where scholars began pointing towards the impact of the market on decision making and, thus, on state sovereignty. Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye (1977; 1989) were among the first to argue that asymmetrical economic interdependence affects state autonomy and provides sources of influence different from those emphasized by realists.<sup>11</sup> They conceptualized interdependence in terms of 'sensitivity' and 'vulnerability', the first referring to the degree to which A is affected if B shifts its policy in a specific issue area (such as oil production), and the second referring to A's (in)ability to switch to an alternative source (such as nuclear energy). Keohane and Nye suggested that international regimes ('rules, norms, procedures') function as intervening factors through which interdependence among states is channelled and shows its effects. Consequently, they identified the ability to make and change these regimes as source of power, an argument further explored in Stephen Krasner's (1985) discussion of 'meta power' (also Carporaso 1978; Beck 2005).

The analysis of regime agenda setting power is not confined to the economic realm but also relevant to the study of international law. Studying the influence of supranational legal institutions such as the European Court of Justice (ECJ) or the International Criminal Court (ICC) and understanding how international law 'works' requires an analysis beyond economic rationales. It points towards the power of ideas of 'legitimacy' and 'justice' and, thus, leads back to Weber's question of the foundations of legal authority.<sup>12</sup> Agenda setting power also matters in the realm of security policy. This ranges from forums like the UN Security Council or NATO where states deliberate and decide

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<sup>10</sup> One could argue with Guzzini (1993: 462) that agenda setting and mobilization bias are not the same, with the former putting more emphasis on agency and the latter on structure

<sup>11</sup> Although, as criticized by Baldwin (1979), Keohane and Nye maintained the primacy of the realist focus on military capabilities.

<sup>12</sup> Claude (1966); Beyers (1999); Bukvansky (2002). For an insightful critique of Beyers, see Orford (2000).

on security problems and appropriate responses (Haftendorn et al. 1999) to the control of information by intelligence services (Hermann 1996), including non-state actors (Leander 2005). Finally, increasing attention is being paid to the role played by international media consortia and the internet in influencing and setting agendas for public opinion.<sup>13</sup>

An important question for IR scholars is whether international regimes increase or decrease vulnerability and, related, to what extent institutional structures enable or constrain those acting within them. The answer hinges on who has the power to write the rules of the game, which can be boiled down to the question whether ‘regimes’ can exercise agenda-setting power independently from their members. Some institutionalists, like Krasner or Keohane, see states as the primary actors which delegate tasks to institutions but remain in control. In this case, the question is which state controls the regime’s agenda, its channels of communication and flows of information, and decides about membership, and thereby enables or prevents participation in the decision making process. The contrasting view holds that international regimes have a significant life of their own and take decision making autonomy away from states. This perspective can be found in the neofunctionalist/supranationalist argument prominent among theorists of European integration (Haas 1964; Sandholz and Stone Sweet 1998), the work on ‘structural power’ informing dependency theory and transnational empire (Galtung 1971; Strange 1988), the argument that international organizations produce effects unintended by their creators (Barnett and Finnemore 1999), and studies on the ability of non-state actors to advocate norms across state boundaries (Risse 2002).

Much of the answer to whether the emergence of new participants on the scene is weakening the state depends on whether the international distribution of ‘power’ is seen in plus or-zero sum terms. Whereas those who in the ‘globalization’ debate in the 1990s proclaimed the state analytically ‘dead’ seem to have assumed the latter, now the view has taken hold that the relationship between state and non-state ‘actors’ is intertwined and cannot be neatly divided into ‘winners’ and ‘losers’. Thus, Michael Mann (1997) argued that not only do effects of economic globalization differ from state to state, but that there generally is a positive relationship between the rise of transnational networks and what he calls the infrastructural power of states (also Weiss 2005).

Thus, the second dimension moves research away not only from the realist focus on war and military capabilities but also from state-centrism by de-territorializing the spatiality of power relations (Agnew, 2003; Beck, 2005). Even if the notion of ‘indirect’ power remains analytically limited to resources activated by and effects brought upon humans, the second dimension invites taking into account a number of ways humans influence their environment that may, eventually, affect humans. As such, the second dimension makes a double-move of expanding both the meaning of power and the range of ‘actors’ able to influence agendas. Yet it is undeniable that this makes power-

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<sup>13</sup> See the contributions in *Millennium*, 32/3, 2003.

relationships much more difficult to pin down. Who, for instance, controls the global economic structure: the consumer or, reviving the argument originally criticized by Dahl, a network of the ‘capitalist elite’? Is agenda-setting necessarily a conscious exercise and, if not, how to think about non-intentional power (Strange 1988)? These are tricky questions. And one may even go one step further by suggesting that institutions not only exclude certain interests from the debate but actually play a role in shaping them (Hall and Taylor 1996). This facet of power is explored in the third dimension.

### **The third dimension: Shaping normality**

Building on Bachrach and Baratz’ argument that power also (indeed, more significantly) operates by creating silences, the third dimension revolves around the view that power is not only at work where there is a *conflict* of interests but also where there is (an apparent) *consensus*. Moving conceptually into the ‘influence’ terrain mentioned earlier, this dimension highlights the forces giving and controlling meaning of ‘normality’. Two authors, Steven Lukes and Michel Foucault, have been particularly influential in discussing this.

Lukes (1974/2005) introduced the ‘third face’ of power by arguing that the absence of conflicting interests does not necessarily indicate the absence of a power relationship. Indeed, he argued, “the most effective and insidious use of power is to prevent such conflict from arising in the first place” (Lukes 2005a: 27). This view was derived from a Gramscian perspective and contains the argument that actors may have the ability of shaping interests of others. In a similar vein, Foucault (1988; 1995; 2002) put forward the notion of ‘productive’ power, which, derived from his analysis of the constitution of the subject, highlights forces constituting identities through discourses of normality. Also using concepts like ‘disciplinary’ or ‘pastoral’ power, as well as ‘governmentality’, Foucault focused on what he called the power-knowledge nexus, that is, on the mechanisms by which expert knowledge is (re)produced.<sup>14</sup> Lukes and Foucault both see power dynamics in terms of shifting intensity rather than a zero-sum distribution. Furthermore, because both approach the study of power from a critical perspective, they see it primarily as having an oppressive/dominating (or ‘power over’) effect, leaving open when, or to what extent, the process of shaping interests and identities has a supportive/enabling (or ‘power to’) effect. Although their arguments do not rule out the latter, they sit uneasy with the positive notion of ‘empowerment’ found in Arendt and, more sophisticated, in Morriss (2002).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> For studies inspired by Foucault, see Said (1979); Dean (1991); Hayward (2000).

<sup>15</sup> On Foucault, see Honneth (1991); Gordon (2002). One could argue there is a shift in how Foucault conceives of productive power, with his later lectures toning down the theme of domination and being more sympathetic to both its enabling effect and the possibility of resistance (thanks to Kimberly Hutchings for pointing this out). In his original argument Lukes explicitly sets his argument in contrast to Arendt (and Parsons). Yet his new edition attempts to incorporate a ‘power to’ argument Lukes (2005a). For a discussion, see Political Studies Review (2006).

This shared ambiguity regarding ‘empowerment’ actually rests on rather different philosophies (see also Lukes, 2005b). As critics have pointed out, Lukes’ approach is more agency-oriented, allowing the analyst to dichotomize between ‘powerful’ and ‘powerless’ agents while containing a thin conceptualization of structure (Hayward 2000; Guzzini 1993). Also, his theoretical discussion gives few insights on how the powerful actually go about shaping the interests of the powerless.<sup>16</sup> By contrast, Foucault’s approach focuses on tracing historically entrenched mechanisms or ‘techniques of subjectification’ which circulate, in the words of Judith Butler (1997: 6), “without voice or signature”.<sup>17</sup> He sees productive power not as something that is (or can be) centrally controlled by an Orwellian ministry of information, but as something that works through diffuse ‘capillaries’ contained in seemingly neutral practices of people working in institutions such as hospitals or prisons. The difference is not merely methodological. Most importantly, Lukes’ perspective requires the assumption of ‘real’ interests, the unconscious deviation from which can be attributed to the third face of power, and it contains the possibility that people recognize them. This begets the question how to determine these ‘real’ interest and, related, whether helping people to overcome their ‘false consciousness’ (what Lukes calls ‘rational persuasion’) is an exercise of power in itself – crucial questions which Lukes remains vague about (Lukes 2005a: 35f, 144f).<sup>18</sup> Rejecting any notion of truth claims and progress, Foucault takes a different track. While agreeing that productive power mechanisms can be made visible through historical analysis and acts of resistance, he emphasizes that they cannot be overcome. This different stand is also reflected in the fact that, whereas Lukes focuses on interests, Foucault analyzes the construction of identities (or, rather, subjects), of which there are no ‘real’ ones. Consequently, according to Foucault, there is nothing such as ‘(il)legitimate’ government, there is only, and always, governmentality (Foucault 1988, 2002; Gordon 2002).

IR’s engagement with the ‘third dimension’ is still a story in the making. Crudely speaking, scholars have approached it from two perspectives. The first is interested in understanding cooperation. Although the gospel of the security dilemma by and large prevented realism from moving the focus on how to win over others towards the question how to *win others over*, the bandwagoning phenomenon has always puzzled IR scholars (Jervis 1999). As Schmidt (2005) reminds, classical realists discussed the power to shape opinion through propaganda or public diplomacy, and the competition for allies during the Cold War spurred analysts to think about the power of carrots in the terminology of “non-coercive” power (Hart 1976) and “nonpower influence” (Knorr 1975). Economic influence bestowed Germany, Japan, and the EC with ‘civilian power’ status (Maull 1990), while others traced the influence of ideology and knowledge through the practices of epistemic communities (Adler 1987; Haas 1990), an amalgam which informed Joseph Nye’s (1990) suggestion

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<sup>16</sup> For empirical studies, see Gaventa (1980), also Kubik (1994).

<sup>17</sup> Which has lead Hayward (2000) to suggest that Foucault’s approach is “de-facing” power relations. See also Guzzini’s (1993) notion of ‘impersonal power’.

<sup>18</sup> For a critical discussion, see Bradshaw (1976).

that ‘soft power’ was the basis for successful US leadership in a post-Cold War world (see also Krause 1991).

Few of these studies, however, engaged insights on ‘power’ from social and political theory.<sup>19</sup> While the rise of constructivist scholarship in the 1990s produced a wave of studies looking at effects of ‘socialization’ and the influence of culture, ideas, and identity on (mainly) security policy, they rarely framed these factors as phenomena of power, thereby writing *in* but not *about* the third dimension.<sup>20</sup> This changed in recent years with notions of ‘soft’ and ‘normative’ power entering popular vocabulary and tempting scholars to take a closer look at their meaning (Nye 2004; Manners 2002). In a recent Special Issue of *Millennium*, Steven Lukes (2005b) and Janice Bially-Mattern (2005) engage Nye’s conception of ‘soft power, with Lukes suggesting that IR scholars would do well to distinguish between indoctrination and empowerment, and Mattern reminding that we need to think more carefully about how ‘attraction’ works in international politics in the first place. In the same issue, Ned Lebow (2005) and Wolf Hassdorf (2005) each look at phenomena of persuasion by drawing on Greek philosophy and Bourdieu, respectively, and Thomas Diez (2005) critically reviews the concept of ‘normative power Europe’ whose analytical value is compromised by its popular use in political rhetoric.

Scholars concerned with themes of ‘resistance’ and ‘unmasking’ the forces upholding the existing order of things have been more conceptually at ease with the third dimension of power. Johan Galtung’s (1969, 1971) exploration of the notion of structural violence can be seen in this tradition, and many IPE scholars writing about American hegemony have picked up on Lukes’ insights (Ashley 1986; Cox 1987; Gill and Law 1989). More recently scholars have begun to apply Foucault’s governmentality approach on the issue of globalization and ‘empire’ (Hard and Negri, 2000; Lipschutz and Rowe 2005; Merlingen 2007). Inspired by a Marxist reading of the dynamic of economic relations, these approaches tend to trace power relations to class divisions in the capitalist order, thus maintaining a material basis of the power structure and treating ideology as a derivate thereof. Consequently, they have difficulties explaining how discursive power resources are accessible and represented across socioeconomic divisions (Guzzini 1993; Kubik 1994). Phenomena of the latter kind are addressed in analyses of ‘identity politics’, looking at the manipulation of symbols, myths, and memories in a broader ideational context, such as nationalism or religion having both reifying and transformative impact (Kubik 1994; Aronoff 1998; Hall 1999). The power of discourse has also been highlighted in feminist and postcolonial studies deconstructing socially dominant categories of gender and race and showing their impact on world politics.<sup>21</sup> By doing so,

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<sup>19</sup> There are exceptions, of course, such as Ruggie’s (1975) discussion of institutional authority, which draws on Weber, and Little’s (1989) take on ‘consensual power’, which draws on Arendt.

<sup>20</sup> See, for instance, Katzenstein (1996); Adler and Barnett (1998); Wendt (1999).

<sup>21</sup> Butler (1997); Enloe (1989, 1996); Orford (2000); Darby (2004); Agathangelou and Ling (2005). Exceptions like Enloe or Tickner (1988) aside, feminist scholars, despite having another reading of power to offer, long

these studies do also see prospects for change through empowerment and the creation of new spaces for participation.

The main challenge faced by all third dimension research is a familiar one: how to study discursively transmitted meaning structures and the manipulation thereof.<sup>22</sup> Few would disagree, for instance, over the symbolic impact of the 9/11 attacks, yet observing and evaluating the power of a brand like Al Queda is difficult. To get an analytical grip on value systems and delineate discursive contexts, scholars have turned to Juergen Habermas' discussion of communicative rationality (Risse 2000), Niklas Luhmanns' autopoietic systems (Guzzini 2004), or Pierre Bourdieu's notion of the field. Indeed, an increasing number of IR scholars apply Bourdieu's view that societies are divided into distinct, though possibly overlapping, cultural spaces (fields), each held together through an internal logic of practices, or *habitus*, and in which power relations are manifested through the distribution of symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1977, 1993).<sup>23</sup>

### **Power and Causality**

Using a certain concept of power not only means making an ontological choice about actors and their relations, it also colors our understanding of causality. Scholars writing on power regularly point towards a close relationship between the two, and it is not difficult to see why.<sup>24</sup> Just as George Sabine noted some time ago that a "statement of what may roughly be called a causal nature" (Sabine, 1969: 12) is a key element of any political theory, 'power' is often found at the centre of an argumentative web. Both concepts give meaning to relationships and are logically linked to effect. Most obviously, if power is the ability to make a difference, that is, if it is *because of* 'power' that things turn out one way rather than another, then identifying 'power' is analytically indistinguishable with identifying a 'cause'.<sup>25</sup> This is significant because it also means identifying who/what is responsible for the way things are, or are likely to be. In other words, power analysis reduces uncertainty and provides ontological security. As a result, 'power' traverses positive and normative theorizing, a prominent example being the alleged link between polarity and war/peace. To assess the usefulness as a positive concept, the challenge then lies not merely in empirically validating 'causality' but, more fundamentally, in recognizing the internal logic of the power argument and the broader theoretical frame it is embedded in. And then thinking about power in terms of causality faces a number of challenges.

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hesitated with engaging the conceptual grammar of a male-dominated discipline. Thus, Keohane's (1989) call on feminist scholars to re-articulate the meaning of power in IR was not well taken (Weber 1994).

<sup>22</sup> For theories of discursive power, see Holzsheiter (2005)

<sup>23</sup> Hassdorf (2005); Leander (2005); Guzzini (2006).

<sup>24</sup> Deutsch (1967: 239); Oppenheim (1976); Baldwin (1979); Guzzini (1993).

<sup>25</sup> There is no difference between 'power' and its effect because 'power' is defined through what it does.

First, if making a difference means that ‘it could have been otherwise’, power can be made analytically responsible for phenomena of both change and continuity.<sup>26</sup> The second dimension identifies power in A preventing B from choosing otherwise through non-decisions and thereby, just as the third dimension, points to mechanisms conserving the status quo. Hence, the challenge is to accommodate the insight of power as maintaining continuity with the view that causal statements, as traditionally understood, are about identifying change. Following Oppenheim (1976: 114), one could do so by seeing maintaining the status quo as a form of hypothetical causation: putting in place sufficient conditions for B not doing x means effectively preventing B from the possibility of doing x, regardless of B’s intentions. Or, vice versa, one could tie up ‘causation’ with the exercise of resistance by arguing that B prefers the status quo and resists A attempts of changing it.

Second, there is the question of how and where to attribute causation in phenomena of ‘indirect’ power and ‘unintended’ effects. The latter is often captured by noting that it does not matter to the grass whether elephants above make love or war. It is easy to establish the causal arrow here (from the elephants activity to the trampled grass), and it is a phenomenon of power as long as power relations are considered from the ‘receiving side’ (the ‘B’ in Dahl’s definition). Although problems arise when responsibility is attached to the exercise of non-intentional power, examples of which include the ‘security dilemma’ as well as studies of ‘empire’. Things get even more difficult with indirect power, that is, when relations are extended and/or fragmented in time and space. For instance, where to locate ‘power’ when looking at how A’s current activities affect the living conditions of some distant or future B or, going one step further, when considering A’s attempts to rule out the very possibility that its lifestyle has an agenda-setting effect on B? It requires considerable analytical sensitivity to see complex causal chains, including notions of circular causality as developed, for instance, in cybernetics. But it also begets the question when one should stop seeing relations, and where there is power in chaos.

The third challenge is how to think about causality in mutually constitutive power relations, whether these are Weberian *Herrschaft* relations or other forms of material or ideational interdependence. In a meaning system in which vulnerability is defined in terms of identity, or what Anthony Giddens (1991) has called ‘ontological security’, even the status of a great power (Agnew 2003) or global civil society (Lipschutz, 2005) relies on ‘significant others’ recognizing its status and able to exercise “representational force” (Mattern, 2005). In particular where hierarchies are difficult to identify, traditional notions of causality are of little value. Hence, research trying to grasp the power of socialization highlighted in the third dimension, cannot escape the distinction between ‘causal’ and ‘constitutive’ explanations attached to positivist and non-positivist research, according to Steve Smith “the main meta-theoretical issue facing international theory” (Smith, 1995: 26).<sup>27</sup> Rather than

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<sup>26</sup> This implies that a full grasp on power phenomena requires counterfactual reasoning (Guzzini 1993: 447).

<sup>27</sup> For a discussion, see Hollis and Smith (1990); Wendt (1998).

assuming a unidirectional relationship between temporally separated ‘dependent’ (Y) and ‘independent’ (X) variables that can be observed from without, questions of how actors are mutually empowered and meaning is intersubjectively constituted require a different perspective on relations.

Here we arrive at the final challenge, namely whether different conceptualizations of power can be subsumed under the same research design. This is what Barnett and Duvall (2005a) advocate by suggesting that different dimensions of power can be applied to different stages of the argumentative chain and, thus, can be combined analytically.<sup>28</sup> Certainly, it seems worthwhile to re-engage the question of fungibility and search for connections between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ power. However, while it is fruitful to explore how value systems overlap and different kinds of resources and actors affect each other *within* a dimension (conflict may occur within military, economic, or religious realms, involving state agents and/or supranational networks, and the same goes for phenomena of agenda setting or socialization), one must be careful not to be seduced into applying multiple *concepts* of power and, thereby, conducting multi-explanatory research. Following Guzzini (1993), there are at least two plausible reasons that speak against such a strategy.

First, doing so may result in the ‘overload fallacy’ (MacIntyre). Connecting different readings of an essentially contested concept embedded in different theories designed to answer different questions is challenging, to say the least. Second, without delving into what is better left to philosophers of science, if different dimensions of power operate with different conceptions of causation, then they are incommensurable. Seeking to find a pattern in conflict outcomes among actors with fixed value systems simply is different from trying to understand how interests and identities emerge and change through interaction. The mapping and comparing of resources done by much first dimension research does not fare well with the emphasis on reflexivity of particular concern to analysts of the third dimension, as highlighted by Guzzini (2005) and Diez (2005). In other words, alternative conceptions of power are precisely that, alternatives. Choosing one is an ontological choice which allows telling one story with one set of actors rather than another one. While these stories may be told in parallel, as demonstrated by Jennifer Sterling-Folker and Rosemary Shinko (2005), one must guard against the idea that there may be a way of conceptualizing power which enables capturing the totality of social relations.

Hence, instead of trying to subsume distinct concepts of power under one research design, it may be more fruitful to pick up on what can be found in all three dimensions, namely to take a closer look at the *process* by which power relations are established. Whether understanding power through exercise or in the sense of delegation, manipulation, (dis)empowerment, socialization, emancipation, recognition, legitimization, resistance, etc – all these see power as something unfolding in a process. Seeing power through process can be linked to strands of pragmatism visible in the writings of

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<sup>28</sup> Barnett and Duvall’s (2005a) complex definition of power can be read as asking for a three-tiered analysis.

Laswell and Kaplan (1950) and Blau (1964) and currently re-discovered by IR scholars.<sup>29</sup> Although one must be careful not to confuse theory with method here, the process perspective links ‘capability’ to ‘effect’ and emphasizes the relational aspect of power, thus providing a corrective to the conceptual dichotomy as either agent capacity or structural ‘governance’, as suggested by Guzzini (1993). Although Guzzini writes about interaction between the two, he conceptualizes ‘agent’ power independent from relations, thereby presenting a frame for power analysis which thinks of poles first and relations after. In contrast, a process perspective sees power as an ‘emerging property’ which only exists in interaction (Blau 1964).

### **Conclusion: Power and Politics**

Having reviewed the multiple facets of power, the question whether observing international politics through the power glass is a ‘realist’ practice should appear redundant. Unfortunately, it is not. At least since Morgenthau appropriated Weber (and, by extension, Nietzsche) who in his lecture on ‘politics as a vocation’ suggested that the one who does politics “strives for power, either as a means in serving other aims...or as ‘power for power's sake’” (Weber 1999: 7, my translation), realists have laid analytical claim on the link between power and politics. Interests understood in terms of power made it possible to see politics as an “autonomous sphere of action” and were therefore declared “the main signposts” (Morgenthau 1960: 5) through the landscape of international politics, meaning *realist* signposts set up by those who understood history. However, leaving aside the problem of pressing past thinkers into a tradition, linking the study/meaning of politics to the study/meaning of power cannot be confined to realism. Even the broadest definition of realism cannot accommodate the above three dimensions, and if all IR scholars studying power relations would have to label themselves realist, the paradigm would lose its meaning.

The more interesting question is, therefore, what the different dimensions of power mean for our understanding of the political. Like power, the notion ‘political’ arises in, or out of, a relationship. Karl Deutsch (1967) describes political relations as power relations, as a relationship of obedience based on the interplay of habits and threats. More precisely, he sees political relations characterized by “the more or less incomplete control of human behavior through *voluntary habits* of compliance in combination with *threats of probable enforcement*” (Deutsch 1967: 232, emphasis added). The two qualifications are worth looking at more carefully. Deutsch contrasts this with obedience obtained through the use of physical violence, which he argues falls outside the realm of politics (Ibid, 235). While this parallels Arendt’s view of power and physical violence as opposites, it still defines politics through an understanding of power intimately tied up with the threat of physical violence. This, again, could be traced to Weber (1992: 80), who suggests that political formations [*Gebilde*] are formations of violence [*Gewaltgebilde*], and who famously defines one such formation, the state, as the community claiming the monopoly over the legitimate use of physical violence within a certain

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<sup>29</sup> On process, see Jackson and Nexon (1999); on pragmatism, see Millennium 31(3), 2002.

space (Weber 1999: 6). Thus, while political relations do not involve the direct application of physical violence, in the case of the Weberian state politics is still fundamentally about who has the ability and the right to do so.

However, as Weber himself pointed out in his discussion of *Herrschaft*, the threat of using force is not necessary to exert influence, a point Deutsch takes up when he speaks about ‘voluntary habits’. Politics as influencing or managing people’s habits can take a structural dimension, with Weber’s concern of the bureaucratization of the state echoing in Foucault’s notion of governmentality. If influencing habits is seen as a form of identity politics, then one can also engage the more agent-oriented version of Carl Schmitt’s (1996: 26) definition of the political, which emphasizes the sovereigns’ ability to make the distinction between friend and enemy. Because such acts of identity constructions draw of lines of inclusion and exclusion, they can also be seen as exercising ‘structural’ violence (Galtung 1969: 168f), or ‘symbolic’ violence as Bourdieu calls it (Lukes 2005: 140f). This points to a kind of *Gewaltgebilde* which makes Morgenthau’s (1960: 5) distinction between the political ‘sphere of action’ and the sphere of economics, ethics, aesthetics, or religion difficult to uphold. At the very least, it requires more careful thinking about the relationship between politics, power, and violence.

Even if the meaning of the political is expanded in this way, it cannot simply be grasped in terms of obedience. Neither did Weber, who in his abovementioned lecture defined politics as “striving for a share of power or to influence the distribution of power” (Weber 1999: 6f, my translation). In the same vein, Carr (2001: 97) referred to the ‘political’ as “issues involving a conflict of power” and involves opposition. Understood as the ability to decide ‘who gets what, when, and how’, politics is *contestation* over the allocation and distribution of resources and values in a society (Deutsch, 1967: 234). This fits with Guzzini’s point that for something to be ‘political’ means to be potentially changeable, to have an alternative, an otherwise (Guzzini 2006: 12). In the broadest sense, this something is the future. Thus, politics as a struggle for power can be seen as a contest between alternative visions, a contest about shaping and being responsible for the future (and the past, at least in the case of identity politics). Finally, an empowerment perspective can also fall into the notion of politics as contestation if expressed in terms of resistance or emancipation. If, however, pursuing ones will is read with Ringmar below as a creative process enabling individuals or groups to realize their potential in a plus-sum relationship, this would suggest an understanding of politics more in the classical Aristotelian sense of seeking the (common) good and happy life, or in Rousseau’s notion of realizing the *volonté générale*.

Here the meaning of the political becomes intertwined with the question where we see ‘politics’ taking place. For many IR scholars, certainly for realists, the state remains the only place within whose boundaries expect ‘proper’ politics is possible, that is, where meaningful debate about rights

and justice can occur (Wight 1966).<sup>30</sup> However, if one acknowledges different dimensions of power then one cannot but see a greater variety of political spaces in world politics reaching beyond the state and into the ‘glocal’ (Beck 2005). As Sterling-Folker and Shinko (2005) demonstrate, this makes research more exciting and more difficult at the same time, posing questions such as whether different power relations create different ‘publics’ and to what extent it is possible to think of “politics via markets” (Lipschutz, 2005). Moreover, as Phillip Darby notes, an expansion of the political needs to refrain from seeing global interaction in the binary modes of domination and resistance and instead “recognize the ambiguity and mobility of the processes and parties involved” (Darby 2004: 26).

In the end, the question of which power relations to focus on implies a choice – and it is a crucial choice. One does not have to be a radical constructivist to recognize what Guzzini calls the performative aspect of power analyses, namely that identifying political spaces and making the distinction between inside (where power is) and outside (where it is not) is itself a political act (Walker 1995). As Steven Lukes put it, “our aim is to represent [power] in a way that is suited for description and explanation. But our conception of it may result from and be shaped by what we are trying to explain...how we think of power may serve to reproduce and reinforce power structures and relations, or alternatively it may challenge and subvert them (...). To the extent that this is so, conceptual and methodological questions are inescapably political (Lukes 2005a: 63). Hence, systematic clarity does not help to “tie down” (Dahl) the concept of power, and certainly this paper does not harbour such ambitions. Power will remain a contested concept, which means IR scholars will have to choose. This would not have satisfied *Faust*. But awareness of different facets of power and critical checking of our theoretical toolbox is an immensely worthwhile enterprise if we recognize that thinking about power is as much about refining explanatory frameworks as it is about devising a theory of politics.

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<sup>30</sup> For a critique of this view, see Walker (1993, 1995); Brown (2002); Darby (2004).

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