Power and Conflict

Perhaps no other aspect of human life has attracted so much of the attention of social scientists as power. Power has been, and continues to be, the focus of study and concern across all social science disciplines. Hundreds of books and articles explain this phenomenon from all possible points of view. However, power is still one of the most disputed and contested of all social concepts.

There are several major problems in a conceptual analysis of power. The power/conflict relationship is one of them. Is power necessarily conflictual or not? If so, must the conflict between actors be manifest, or may it be latent? Does the exercise of power always harm subject's interests? Answering these questions is an important element of a conceptual analysis of power, with a significant impact on empirical studies of power relationships: the results of these studies largely depend on the concept of power applied, on the choice between its 'conflictual' and 'non-conflictual' interpretations.

There is little agreement upon the correct answer to these questions. Many scholars argue that power exists only in situations of conflict (over, covert or latent) between actors where the powerholder acts *against a subject's interests* (wants, desires, needs, preferences). Power is viewed as something 'negative' since it necessarily involves 'causing harm' - suppression, restriction, or manipulation of individual or group interests. Some authors, such as Bachrach and Baratz (1970: 21, 24), explicitly base an understanding of power on a concept of conflict. Other researchers do not include 'conflict' in their explicit definitions of power but do, in fact, hold to this view. This is implicit in Dahl, who contends that power is only revealed by conflict: 'if everyone were

perfectly agreed on ends and means, no one would ever need to change the way of another. Hence no relations of influence or power would arise' (Dahl, 1970: 59). Barry relates 'conflict' only to the *exercise of power*. He argues that 'some degree of conflict of goals is obviously a necessary condition for the exercise of power (though not for the *possession* of power) in its most general social sense, for unless A wants B to do something B would not otherwise do, A can have no reason for wanting to change B's behaviour' (Barry, 1974: 198). Lukes (1974) asserts that only the conflict of *interests* is necessarily present in all power relationships, whereas actual (overt or covert) conflict - conflict of subjective wants and preferences - can be absent in the 'third face of power'.

Some observers argue that the 'conflictual' interpretations of power are widely accepted by scholars. Nagel (1975: 154) writes that 'most writers believe that conflict is a necessary condition of power'. He refers to Weber (1947), Bierstedt (1950), Dahl (1957), Bachrach and Baratz (1963), Kahn (1964) and Etzioni (1968: 31I7). Martin (1993: 90) contends that the assumption of conflict and antagonism is built into the 'Weberian definition and its derivatives'.

However, many scholars reject 'conflict' as a necessary element of power. Moreover, it is argued that 'the view that most writers associate power and conflict is misleading' (Debnam, 1984: 8). To confirm this assertion Debnam refers to Parsons (1959: 81), Lane (1976: 223), Giddens (1976: 112), De Crespigny (1968: 193), Oppenheim (1978: 607) and Frey (1971: 1089). He concludes that 'there are, in fact, very few who refer to conflict as a necessary element and even here the reference is not always directly to conflict, but to the use of various forms of control (Debnam, 1984: 8).

Most scholars who define power via conflict speak about conflictual *behaviour* or

the conflict of *preferences*,[1] whereas Lukes, Poulantzas and Marxist scholars explain power n terms of the conflict of *interests*.[2] Lukes points out that 'the one-dimensional' and 'the two-dimensional' conceptions of power stress an actual observable conflict, overt or covert. 'The one-dimensional' (pluralist) conception contains conflict between preferences that are assumed to be consciously aired, exhibited in actions, and thus to be discovered by observing people's behaviour. 'The two-dimensional' view (Bachrach and Baratz) widens the concept by including the conflict of preferences in the form of overt or covert grievances (Lukes, 1974: 14, 20). But only 'the three-dimensional' view admits that power may exist in situations where *actual observable* conflict (conflict of preferences) is absent. Lukes does not assume that power may occur without *any* conflict at all. When the conflict of subjective preferences is absent, power, he argues, may be based on a '*latent conflict*, which consists in a contradiction between the interests of those exercising power and the *real interests* of those they exclude. These latter may not express or even be conscious of their interests' (Lukes, 1974: 24-25).

Since conflict of preferences and conflict of interests (objective interests) are two rather different matters, they should be clearly distinguished in the analysis of the power/conflict relationship.

Let us begin with the conflict of preferences. What are the reasons for viewing power as a relation between actors with conflicting preferences? Usually this has been explained by the need *to distinguish influenced behaviour from autonomous, self-directed behaviour* and exclude from power cases where people act voluntarily (Frey, 1971: 1089); Lane and Stenlund, 1984: 349), for example, where they are motivated by a

[1] They also use the expression 'conflict of interests' in the sense of 'conflict of preferences'.

[2] Lukes (1974: 27): A exercises power over B when A affects B in a manner contrary to B's interests.

possibility of getting a reward, or follow someone's advice, or behave themselves in accordance with their values and moral duties. Practically speaking, theorists in fact propose to exclude from the realm of power inducement (offering of rewards for compliance with a command), persuasion, manipulation and some forms of authority.

I will offer a few illustrations to clarify this position. Benn (1976: 424) explicitly contrasts power (which contains conflict) with rational persuasion: 'The limiting case at the end of the scale at which conflict is least would be rational persuasion, for to offer a man good reasons for doing something is not to exercise power over him, although it may influence his decision'. Lukes (1974: 33) argues that in the persuasion B *autonomously* accepts A's reasons. 'Was Keynes powerful (rather than immensely influential) because of his impact on post-war economic policy (an impact he undoubtedly wanted)?' - asks Lukes (1986: 16). Lukes thinks he was not and emphasizes that 'freely accepting advice and being convinced by arguments is incompatible with being subject to power (as control)'.

The question of whether inducement (positive sanction) can be viewed as an exercise of power or not has been discussed by exchange theorists. Some of them, for example, Blau, oppose exercise of power to inducement and persuasion and associate power with the ability to use *negative* sanctions and overcome resistance. Baldwin (1978: 12321) has explained the alleged distinction between power and exchange succinctly: 'Exchange, it is argued, is voluntary, while power involves A getting B to act "against his [B's] will". Thus, power relations are characterized by conflict, while exchange relations are characterized by co-operation'.

Authority is also often contrasted with power because it does not necessarily presuppose conflicting values in the minds of the powerholder and the power subject.

Bachrach and Baratz cite the following example to illustrate the difference between power and authority:

> Imagine, first, an armed military sentry who is approached by an unarmed man in uniform. The sentry levels his gun at the intruder and calls out, "Halt or I'll shoot!" The order is promptly obeyed. Did the sentry therefore have power and exercise it? So it would seem; but appearances could be deceiving. Suppose that the intruder obeyed, not because he felt compelled to do so in the face of the threatened sanction, but because he was himself a trained soldier for whom prompt obedience to a sentry's order was part of a system of values he fully accepted. If that was the case, there was no conflict of goals or interests between the two principals; the sentry's threatened sanction was irrelevant, and the result would have been the same if he, and not the intruder had been unarmed. Because the soldier put obedience to a sentry's order at the top of her schedule of values, the threat of severe deprivations had no bearing on his behaviour. In such circumstances it cannot be said that the guard exerted power. (Bachrach and Baratz, 1970: 20)

In all the above quotations the core of the 'conflictual' view of power is clearly stated: when power is exercised, B acts *involuntarily*, that is, does something *against his will*. By contrast, when people are motivated by the possibility of getting a reward (inducement), or follow someone else's advice (persuasion), or behave themselves in accordance with their values and moral duties (authority) they act voluntarily.

In my view, the dichotomy between 'involuntary' compliance within a power relation and 'voluntary' behaviour of the subject in all other cases where somebody makes him act differently is doubtful. One reason is the some people often have no preferences ('will') at all. So if we accept the 'conflictual' view of power we would have to say that no one can ever exercise power over them (with respect to particular issues) since no influence attempt will be against their preferences.

One may argue that in this situation the individual's preference (will) is to do nothing (or not to do anything); hence, any successful attempt to break the status quo makes his action *involuntary*. But this would only be the case, I think, if the subject's

inaction is *intentional*, that is, only if he considers his inaction as his preference.[3] In other situations, for example, when the powerholder induces the subject to pursue one rather than another of several equally attractive and mutually exclusive alternatives, a subject's actions should not be considered as 'involuntary', although they evidently are not (completely) autonomous and self-directed. That is, *not all non-autonomous actions are necessarily involuntary*.

One may argue further, than *any* other-ascribed changes in the behaviour or attitudes of the subject evoke his reluctance or even resistance to these changes - independently of his preferences and intentions - just because they lead to some extra physical or mental effort, waste of energy, time or any other 'expenditure'. Therefore, the subject's actions are always, *to some extent*, involuntary: if the powerholder had not exercised power, the subject would not have acted in such a way. Hence, *some degree* of conflict in the relationship between powerholder and subject is a necessary condition for the exercise of power.

That is true. But it does not prove that conflict is inherent to power. All the above instances can also be compared to *any human action* - both other-ascribed or self-ascribed. Preferences do not always coincide with wants and desires. People often do not want to work hard although it may be among those preferences which they understand. If a person does not like to obey someone's command but understands that it is not against his interests (does not contradict his preferences), his action is not, I think, involuntary. Action can be called 'involuntary' if it is *against* an actor's preferences. Conflict between powerholder and subject exists only in situations where their preferences are *opposite* or, at least, *seriously different*. Although the term 'conflict' is

[3] Bachrach and Baratz follow the same logic when presenting non-decisions as events.

frequently used to cover all possible contradictions (tensions, collisions) between people and is often accompanied by such attributions as 'potential', 'latent', 'tacit', 'soft', etc., in its true sense the concept of conflict[4] indicates a visible contention, controversy, or even opposition; it means rather 'competition', 'struggle', 'resistance', 'friction' rather than 'difference' or 'disagreement'.[5] Therefore, it is not quite correct to use the term 'conflict' in the absence of *mutually exclusive preferences* of actors.[6]

In my view, the inclusion of 'conflict' in the definition of power unjustifiably restricts the realm of power by expelling cases where the subject of power has no initial preference (with respect to a particular issue) and, hence, cannot be in conflict with the powerholder. That is, it rules out all relationships between actors with identical or similar interests (preferences) where the powerholder is able to control a subject's behaviour and/or consciousness without resort to coercion or force. For example, it excludes command-obedience relationships in organizations and institutions based on legal rights and obligations, leadership among confederates, relationships between a teacher and a pupil, a priest and believer, a greater and lesser intelligence, all kinds of control over politically indifferent people, successful attempts to mobilize them in support of political objectives and many other cases which we are otherwise inclined to specify as the exercise of power.

Besides, it neglects various forms of mental power - power over people's

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[4] The word 'conflict' derives from the Latin word 'conflictus' meaning 'collision', 'clash'.

[5] Some authors are inclined to view social conflict as 'the highest stage of the contradiction between individuals, groups, or social institutions' (Gvishiani and Lapin, 1988: 125).

[6] From this point of view Lukes's utilization of the term 'conflict' ('latent conflict') in cases where actors (one or even both) are not aware of the discrepancy between their interests ('the third dimension of power') is not quite correct. The term 'conflict', I think, can be applied only in cases of actual (recognized) disagreement between parties.

consciousness where the powerholder rather intends to *change* the will (preferences, interests) of the subject than to get him to act *against his will*. 'The conflictual' conceptions, in fact, limit the scope of power by behaviour, since it is impossible to get people to *think (believe) against their will*.[7] In the meantime, control over information, knowledge and other 'subtle' ways of directing people's behaviour become the most effective and popular resource of modern governors, politicians, managers or parents.

A common argument against the view that power is always conflictual and is based on force or coercion is the so-called 'Praetorian Guard argument'. Wrong puts it in the following way:

> The wielders of the instruments of force, even though they may succeed in instilling fear in the rest of the population, must be united among themselves and obedient to their leaders on grounds other than fear. Since both the actual use of force and the display of its instruments for purposes of threat require a social organization, it is argued that the wielders of force themselves must submit to the direction of their leader out of motives other than the fear of force. For they cannot reasonably be afraid of themselves; hence it must be concluded that material rewards, or belief in the legitimacy of their collective task, or devotion to the personal authority of a leader must be the basis of their compliance. Thus even under the most ruthless military dictatorships or police states, the army or the police are not coerced by their own leaders but obey them for reasons other than fear. The political system may be based on a fear-love mix in which fear is by far the largest component, but non-coercive bonds prevail at the very least among the controllers of the means of violence even though they may be a small minority. ... [So] power cannot be exercised without some voluntary support, as for example by a faithful praetorian guard. (Wrong, 1988: 93)

Further, the inclusion of conflict in the definition of power creates additional problems with the distinction between 'voluntary' and 'involuntary' action. That this is often not an easy task has been pointed out by Baldwin. His main idea is that 'B can make no meaningful assessment of his "will" without taking opportunity costs into account - and neither can the social scientist who wants to explain B's response to A's

[7] I do not consider cases of psychological intervention in people's consciousness which would be better explained in terms of 'mental coercion'.

influence attempt' (Baldwin, 1978: 1232). He illustrates his idea by the following example:

> If one were to ask whether someone would like to work eight hours a day on an assembly line, it is doubtful that any answer whatsoever would be forthcoming until the reward (wage) was specified or implied. I know very few college professors who would say "yes" if the wages were three dollars per hour, but I know very few who would say "no" if the wages were a million dollars per hour. ... The apothem that "every man has his price" is no doubt false but it represents an analytical perspective that is more useful to the student of power than the perspective that depicts people as "acting against their wills" or "despite his resistance". (Baldwin, 1978: 1232)

The idea that it is meaningless to speak about an actor's will (preferences) without taking opportunity cost into account refers not only to inducement and positive sanctions in economic transactions, but to any other kind of human activity. The subject's willingness or unwillingness to comply with the powerholder's demands depends on his evaluation of the opportunity cost he associates with the compliance. The latter, in turn, depends on the alternatives offered by the powerholder and his attempts to influence the subject's evaluation. Since the opportunity cost correlates to the powerholder's activity, the subject's preferences cannot be fixed initially. Therefore, the powerholder in these cases rather changes the subject's evaluation of the opportunity cost of the compliance (and non-compliance) than acts 'against his will'.[8]

Finally, although I do not share Lukes's conception of power, his basic ideas are undoubtedly correct, that is, that power may exist without actual conflict between actors and that the most effective and insidious use of power is to prevent such conflict from arising ('the third dimension of power'). Therefore, his criticism of the one-dimensional

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[8] Here I do not argue that the exercise of power always leads to an alteration of the subject's preferences. Many forms of control over people's behaviour (for example, physical coercion, force) are exercised clearly against their will. I only want to say that it is often impossible to distinguish between 'involuntary' and 'voluntary' behaviour, actions 'from the subject's will' and 'against subject's will'.

and the two-dimensional views for their behavioural focus must be accepted.

In my view, power can be consensual and may facilitate the achievement of goals of both powerholder and subject. This does not contradict a common sense and ordinary meaning of the word 'power'.[9] On the contrary, the inclusion of conflict in the definition of power may lead to conclusions that run counter to common sense since power *over* people does not necessarily mean *against* people. For example, most people would probably agree that their government exercises power over them, but very few would say that this power is *always* against them. The family relationship is another case of this.

As against Lukes and Bachrach and Baratz, I think that their examples of Keynes and the military sentry can be viewed as examples of power (the exercise of power): in both cases the powerholders were able to realize their intentions and get subjects to do something they would not otherwise do, that is, were able to achieve the subjects' compliance; the actions and attitudes of both subjects were dependent on the powerholders' intentions. Particular cases of persuasion, authority and inducement *can* be related to power (the exercise of power) and explained as its forms. Here I agree with Baldwin (1978: 1238), Oppenheim (1981: 39) and other theorists who view power as a concept bringing together *all* methods by which one actor determines another actor's conduct.

I turn now to the relation between *conflict of interests* (as distinct from conflict of preferences) and *power*. Although Lukes insists that *all* views of power ('the one-dimensional', 'the two-dimensional', 'the 'three-dimensional') are tied to particular

[9] Consensual power is succinctly illustrated by Collingwood (1942: 153-154): 'Watch two men moving a piano; at a certain moment one says "lift" and the other lifts.'

conceptions of ‘interests’, ‘it is only really with the radical, three-dimensional view that ‘interests’ come to the fore’ (Clegg, 1989: 91). Only Lukes, Connolly, Poulantzas and Marxist scholars explicitly include ‘interests’ in their definitions of power, while most other theorists avoid the term or use it in the sense of ‘subjective preferences’.

The main reason for defining power via conflict of *interests* is, Lukes contends, that power should not be limited by cases of actual (overt or covert) conflict between actors. ‘The most effective and insidious use of power’, he emphasizes, is to shape or determine people’s preferences ‘in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things, either because they can see or imagine no alternative to it, or because they see it as natural and unchangeable, or because they value it as divinely ordained and beneficial (Lukes, 1974: 23-24). Therefore, ‘conflict of preferences’ must be substituted with ‘conflict of interests’ since ‘interests’ embrace not only people’s preferences, but something which people do not actually recognise.

For Lukes, the concept of interest is necessary in order to distinguish *significant (non-trivial)* affecting of B by A from *non-significant* (mere causal) influence. The absolutely basic common core of our understanding of power, he argues, is the notion of the bringing about of consequences (‘A in some way affects B’). But since ‘we all affect the world and one another in countless ways all the time’ a conception of power useful for understanding social relationships must incorporate a criterion of significance - that is, it must imply an answer to the question: What makes the consequences brought about by A significant in such a way as to count as power?’ (Lukes, 1978: 634-635).

Lukes has not been satisfied with the criteria of significance suggested by most other authors (intentionality, realization of powerholder’s will, conflict of preferences).

He broadens the application of the concept 'to cover the actions, and perhaps inaction, of (individual and collective) agents which further their interests (which may or may not coincide with their intentions, if such they have)' (Lukes, 1978: 635). That is, the inclusion of 'interests' is held to deepen the understanding of the range of significant affecting as compared with other views.

Needless to say, the plausibility and validity of Lukes's arguments primarily depend on the explanation of the notion of 'interest' ('real' or 'objective' interest) and the way it is connected with power. In contrast to 'Power: A Radical View', where the notion of 'interest' has not been explicated, in his editor's introduction to a collection of essays on power (Lukes, 19896) he pays special attention to the explanation of the meaning of this term. Following Feinberg (1984), Lukes distinguishes between two categories of interests: (1) 'ulterior interests' (ultimate goals and aspirations) and (2) 'welfare interests' ('the necessary means to his more ultimate goals, whatever the latter may be, or later come to be'). Interests differ from wants. An individual can fail to want something that is in his interests, either because he does not know it is in his interests, or because he does not know it is causally related to what is in his interests, or because he may have other overriding wants. As regards *welfare interests*, Feinberg and Lukes are inclined to say that 'what promotes them is good for a person *in any case*, whatever his beliefs and wants may be'; for example, an interest in health. As regards *ulterior interests*, by contrast, 'wants seem to have an essential role to play' if wants change, interests will also change. But not every want, however strong or urgent, is sufficient to create such interests: 'it must be linked to longer-range purposes and, Feinberg suggests, have at least these features: that is "a relatively deep-rooted and stable want whose fulfilment (can) both be reasonably hoped for and (usually) influenced by

one's own efforts'" (Lukes, 1986: 6; Feinberg, 1984: 37, 42, 45, 60).

The main point for our discussion here is that people, according to Lukes, may or may not know their interests. Therefore, conflicts of interests can be observable (conflicts of subjective wants or preferences) or latent (conflicts of unrecognized interests). The latter, in turn, can be of two rather different kinds: (1) both actors are unaware of the conflict between their interests; (2) one actor (the powerholder) recognizes the conflict of interests, while another actor (the subject) - does not. Conflict between powerholder and subject, Lukes contends, can be of any kind - overt, covert or latent. He also allows that both powerholder and subject may be unaware of the conflict of interests between them. Lukes (1978: 635) explicitly criticises the intentional conception of power since it assumes that 'groups such as elites will not have or exercise power unless they are united and consciously pursue their goals'.[10]

Evidently, the difficulties in Lukes's conception of power are primarily related to the notions of 'latent conflict' and 'real interests'. Lukes in fact widens the meaning of power by including latent conflict - conflict between the interests of the powerholder and the *real interests* of the power subject. He emphasizes that this conflict is latent in the sense that it is assumed that there *would* be a conflict of wants or preferences between those exercising power and those subject to it, were the latter to become aware of their interests (Lukes, 1974: 25, footnote). Accordingly, Lukes relates 'real interests' to 'what they [people] would want and prefer, were they able to make the choice' (Lukes, 1974: 34).[11] Lukes does not clearly explain this situation. He just emphasizes that the

[10] For Lukes elites have and exercise power just because their actions (or inactions) are against the interests of other people.

[11] He underlines the difference between his account of 'latent conflict' and 'real interest' and Dahrendorf's account of 'objective' and 'latent' interests as 'antagonistic interests conditioned by, even inherent in,

identification of 'real interests' is 'not up to A, *but* to B, exercising choice under conditions of relative autonomy and, in particular, independently of A's power - e.g. through democratic participation' (Lukes, 1974: 33).[12]

Arguing that latent conflict (conflict of real interests) is a necessary condition of power in cases where an observable conflict (conflict of overt or covert preferences or subjective wants) is absent, Lukes anticipates situations where these two kinds of conflict would be 'in conflict' with each other, for example, when A gets B to do something B would not otherwise have done *in B's real interests*. Lukes suggests two possible explanations of this case: (1) 'A might exercise "short-term power" over B (with an observable conflict of subjective interests), but that if and when B recognizes his real interests, the power relation ends: it is self-annihilating'; (2) since the control over a subject constitutes a violation of his autonomy, it cannot be in the subject's real interests because the subject always has a real interest in his own autonomy. Lukes is inclined to adopt the first explanation. He realises that this interpretation 'is open to misuse by seeming to provide a paternalist licence for tyranny',[13] but hopes to obviate this danger 'by insisting on the empirical basis for identifying real interests' (Lukes, 1974: 33).

Although Lukes's approach has become a target of criticism, his contribution to

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social orientations'. Dahrendorf, Lukes writes, assumes as sociologically given what he (Lukes) claims to be empirically ascertainable (Lukes, 1974: 25, footnote).

[12] Luke's understanding of 'real interests' is close to Connolly's (1993: 64) definition: 'Policy x is more in A's real interest than policy y if A, were he to experience the *results* of both x and y, would *choose* x as the result he would rather have for himself'. Both connect 'real interests' with autonomy and choice. Clegg (1989: 9 2) points to the linkage between Lukes's and Connolly's accounts with Habermas's model of an 'ideal speech situation'. By this Harems means a situation in which individuals are absolutely unconstrained in their ability to participate in any discourse on the conditions of their own existence. Clog (1989: 92) contends that Lukas's argument could have been considerably stronger had Lukes made reference to Habermas's model which claimed to be able to reveal what real interests are, given that a specific set of conditions are met.

[13] The second interpretation, by contrast, 'furnishes an anarchist defence against it, collapsing all or most cases of influence into power' (Lukes, 1974: 33).

the conceptual analysis of power is generally acknowledged. It relates, first of all, to his critique of the behavioural focus in conceptualizing power, peculiar to most of his predecessors. Lukes's idea that power can exist in situations of observable consensus between actors, where the subject is not aware of the powerholder's power over him is, in my view, perfectly correct. It obviously corresponds to common sense and accords with our interest in the study of power. Evidently, power is exercised not only over people's behaviour, but over their consciousness, wants, needs and beliefs. Moreover, the 'latent' exercise of power where the subject cannot resist the powerholder's will is undoubtedly the most effective ('supreme', 'insidious') way of exercising control over people. Finally, if we are interested in the concept of power which embraces *all* forms of A's getting B to do what B would not otherwise have done, 'the third dimension of power' must be accepted.

I would also like to emphasize that difficulty with the empirical identification of 'the third face of power', pointed to by some scholars, is not a reason to reject the very existence of this 'face'. Lukes's approach substantially deepens our understanding of power and highlights important aspects of social reality which have escaped the attention of researchers. That is, it is theoretically significant. True, in contrast to those forms of power which contain overt conflict between actors, 'three-dimensional power' is much more difficult to investigate. But this may be claimed of any study which concerns human consciousness, beliefs or needs. That empirical observation of behaviour is relatively easier to provide does not mean that the study of power must be limited to the sphere of observable behaviour. However, much of the criticism of Lukes's view should be accepted. This relates to both the notion of 'real interests' and the reasons for

including conflict of interests in the definition of power.

The most vulnerable element is, I think, Lukes's understanding of 'real interests' as preferences that individuals would have chosen had power not been exercised over them. This has been noted by most of Lukes's critics. Bradshaw (1993: 270) argues that the procedure by which Lukes proposes to identify 'real interests', 'will lead to the crystallization of *different preferences* (perhaps), but not necessarily to the revelation of "real interests"'. He also contends that it is hardly possible to state and fix 'relative autonomy' since 'B's hypothesized independence of A's power fails to rule out the likelihood of B's continued subjection to other sources of power which, even though opposed to A, may still be inimical to B. The removal of the first power subject from the scene, even where possible, merely recompromises the object B's 'relative autonomy' in the face of other exercisers of power' (Bradshaw, 1993: 270).

The problem can be put in a broader context: is it possible to speak about power independently of social structures and external factors which influence the beliefs, attitudes and behaviour of social actors? I think not, because they constitute *conditions* of causal relation, that is they are 'responsible' for the very existence of power and its exercise. Moreover, the formation of a characteristic pattern of wants, preferences and objectives is, as Benton points out, a fundamental aspect of the overall formation of personal and social identities and identifications. He writes:

> There are important respects, therefore, in which to speculate as to what an actor might do, or might have done, in the absence of such processes is to ask an incoherent question. In the absence of *any* form of socializing practices, it is hard to see how social actors could be said to express preferences or make choices in any recognizable sense at all. If, on the other hand, we are to imagine the outcome of socializing practices which are radically reorganized and quite different from the ones with which we are familiar (both the Connolly and Lukes analyses of interests require at least this) then it is hard to see how it would be appropriate to speak of the *same* actor as author of the hypothetical preferences, wants, etc. (Benton, 1993: 290-291)

Certainly, Lukes does not suggest liberating the subject of power from all structural conditions and identifying what would be in the best of all possible worlds. 'But we take his method of the exclusion of power subjects to an absurd length', writes Bradshaw (1993: 270), 'in order to demonstrate that, if we cannot agree that the removal of A constitutes "relative autonomy" for B, the removal of subsequent power subjects would bring us ever closer to a ridiculously barren, asocial arena.'

Lukes replies that there are 'authentic' preferences of actors since not *all* preferences are heteronomous, the product of some exercise of power. That is true. But these preferences cannot, I think, be considered as 'real interests' in any case. Even 'cleared' from the external influence, the subject's preferences are no more 'real' ('authentic') than those which are under the powerholder's control. Unless we accept the idea of 'pure' consciousness, inherently given to human beings, which 'in the real world' is negatively influenced by 'bad' social structure and powerholders, we cannot distinguish between 'real' and 'false' interests in the manner suggested by Lukes: we have no grounds for privileging the newly acquired identity over the former. In other words, Lukes given us no criteria to distinguish between B as an autonomous agent and B as a heteronomous one.

Besides, even in hypothetical cases of a 'relative autonomy' people may choose to do things which are *evidently* not in their 'real' interests. The procedure for the identification of 'real interests' suggested by Lukes, as Clegg (1989: 94-95) contends, in fact mean that 'real interests can be settled by reference to the conventions that are current in a community and expressed by individuals'. From this perspective, he argues, 'one would be obliged to accept that an addiction [to heroin, cigarettes or to some other

life-threatening narcotics] . . . is in the interests of an addict if such a person, under conditions of relative autonomy, maintains that he or she would still want to have become addicted'. Lukes's approach evidently contradicts common sense since being addicted to something which threatens one's life can hardly be in one's interests, despite one's choosing to be so addicted (Clegg, 1989: 95).

Further, a person actually has many different interests which may contradict each other. Thereby, power over him can be exercised simultaneously in and against his particular interests. For example, both rapid industrial development and anti-pollution policy are obviously among interests (actual and 'real') of most citizens. But they often have to choose to pursue one interest at the expense of the other. Crenson's study of two American steel towns suggests that the citizens of those communities could not pursue both of the fairly basic interests of full employment and a healthy atmosphere. The effect of imposing clean air legislation on steel companies would be financially crippling and would lead to a cutback in production and employment. Thus, to refer a particular case or social relation to 'power' we have to examine *a hierarchy of subject's interests* which, of course, makes the task much more difficult. Besides, we cannot simply rank people's interests in an absolute hierarchical order. As Debnam puts it,

> We cannot know, in advance of information about the specific situation in which the question 'what are his interests?' is put, what an individual's interests are, and, more important, how to establish priorities between them. . . . No useful statement of interests can, therefore, ignore the situation in which those interests are defined. Nor can it, for our purposes, ignore any reference to the outcomes selected as focal points for a study of power. We are obliged, therefore, not to establish an individual's interests *tout court*, but to settle what his interests are in relation to any given outcome. (Debnam, 1984: 50)

Another argument against the inclusion of interests in the definition of power is that interests (preferences) cannot be viewed just as 'inherent properties of agents', as

‘somehow determined outside the conditions of particular practices and struggles’. They depend on conditions, circumstances, resources and external forces (Hindess, 1993: 347). Therefore, changes in conditions may lead to changes in interests; the researcher cannot fix interests as something absolutely stable, but must take into account their dynamics.

Some authors explain contradictions and inconsistencies in Lukes’s conception of power as a result of ‘employing’ a Marxian notion [of ‘real interests’] in a very non-Marxist way’ (Bradshaw, 1993: 27I1). They argue that in order to make the concept of ‘real interests’ consistent and logically coherent, Lukes has to sacrifice moral relativism for the moral absolutism of Marxism which he strenuously avoids (Clegg, 1989: 98; Bradshaw, 1993: 271; Bilgrami, 1976: 273). Evidently, to make a choice between ‘real’ and ‘false’ interests we need some evaluative measure which is itself suspended from evaluation by virtue of a commitment to its tenets as true. But here we deal with faith since ‘no necessity attaches to these . . . and the act of faith can never be a rationally persuasive mechanism for one who does not believe’ (Clegg, 1989: 97). In contrast to Lukes, whose conception of ‘real interests’ lacks such a measure, Marxists justify ‘real interest’ as *objectively ‘real’* by its appropriateness to what Marxism considers to be the inevitable, transcendent course of history (Bradshaw, 1993: 271).

Lukes’s reasons for avoiding this way of identifying ‘real interests’ are understandable, since it blurs the distinction between ‘interests’ and ‘ideals’ by covertly collapsing the latter into the former and leads to ‘paternalism’, ‘vanguardism’, ‘elitism’, justification of tyrannies, etc. Therefore, his conception of interests retains its connection with actual wants and preferences. Lukes emphasizes that identification of B’s interests is not up to A, but to B, exercising choice under conditions of relative autonomy; he understands ‘real interests’ as *self-ascribed* preferences. However, he fails to explain

'real interests' in a purely non-objectivist way (perhaps this is just impossible). The procedure he proposes to identify "real" interests, as Benton notes, in fact assumes that B would not be in a position to recognize his true interests.

> This may be because B's preferences, beliefs, attitudes, aspirations are the object of sustained manipulation, or perhaps (to be still more three-dimensional) have been produced by a whole system and form of life which is inimical to the real interests of B. Only someone, or some group, *not* subject to such manipulation of social production (socialization) - *ex hypothesi*, *not* B - would be in a position to recognize B's true interests. (Benton, 1993: 287)

The judgement can be made either by the powerholder or an external observer *on behalf* of the subject, but not by the subject himself. 'This is still other-ascription of interests, and not self-ascription' (Benton, 1993: 289).

The inconsistency of Lukes's approach clearly reveals itself in his interpretation of 'short-term power'. If Lukes adopted the Marxian notion of interests, which detached the concept of interests from that of wants and preferences, he would have to exclude 'short-term power' from the realm of power. But Lukes does not want to do that since his intention is not to reject the one- and two-dimensional views (which treat interests as preferences) or substantially transform them, but to *incorporate* them in his three-dimensional conception of power. In fact, Lukes shares with the one- and two-dimensional views of power the "subjective" conception of "interests" as preferences, wants, overt or covert grievances, but *broadens* its application to cover cases where the subject does not realize them. He continues to speak about interests in terms of wants and preferences, but admits them to be recognized by actors only under particular conditions (relative autonomy).

The application of such a broad conception of interests inevitably leads to the contradiction between two ideas embedded in his theory: (1) power exists *only* if A

affects B contrary to his *interests*; hence, if A affecting B is *not contrary to B's interests* then A does not exercise power over B; (2) power exists in *all* cases where A successfully affects B contrary to his (B's) overt or covert *preferences* (this is assumed because Lukes's 'three-dimensional' view incorporates the one- and two-dimensional views in his theoretical framework). Lukes admits that the subject of power *may simultaneously possess* two different *preferences* - actual conscious preference and latent ('real') preference which can be revealed in the condition of a relative autonomy. Thus, *A may simultaneously affect B both in B's interests and against B's interests*. The cases where A acts against B's *real interests* but not contrary to B's actual preferences he called 'the third dimension of power', while the case where A acts against B's *actual preferences* but in his real interests - 'short-term power'.

Lukes does not describe and explain these two cases; the latter has only been mentioned and briefly sketched. This is, of course, understandable: his primary intention is to attract attention to the latent (unobservable) exercise of power which has usually been missed by his predecessors. Another reason is that he probably considers the 'third dimension of power' to be more important for the explanation and analysis of political life. According to radical and social theory, power elites are not inclined to act in the interests (real interests) of subordinate groups. Interests of elites and 'real' interests of non-elites are supposed to be in conflict. Therefore, to realize their own interests, elites have to act against 'real' interests of people by overcoming their resistance (when people recognize their 'real' interests), or by cultivating 'false consciousness'. Lukes probably thinks that cases where A acts in B's 'real' interests but against his actual preferences ('short-term power') are not so common to social and political life in comparison with cases where A acts against B's real interests but in accord with his actual preferences

('the third dimension of power').

If Lukes really thinks this, he is incorrect. Cases of 'short-term power' are not so extraordinary in political life or in human relationships more generally, as they seem to be at the first glance. For example, many people do not understand the necessity (and future benefits) of radical political or economic reforms and therefore resist their implementation. Children are inclined to underestimate the role of knowledge in their future life, they usually realize their 'real' interest in getting knowledge (and appreciate the teacher who made them well-educated against their will) only when they become adults. Situations where a powerholder acts in the interests of subordinates but against their preferences[14] often occur in organizations where information is concentrated at the top and subordinates are not involved in the policy-making process. In any case, even if these situations are not so common as situations where A acts against B's real interests, it does not follow that they can be discarded or considered as 'secondary' cases. From the *theoretical* point of view both cases are equally important.

Thus, if Lukes intends not to reject but just to broaden the traditional meaning of 'interests' by including 'real' interests in its content, he has to admit the exercise of power in *all* cases where A acts against B's interests and/or preferences. But this will lead him to the conclusion that power can be exercised *in the interests* (real interests) of B as well as against these interests. This perspective also does not suit Lukes since it, in fact, means that *interests do not constitute a defining property of power: power can be defined independently of the notion of interests*.

All the above allows us to conclude that Lukes's explanation of power, based on

[14] Since the subject of power, as we have seen, cannot recognize his 'real' interests himself, we may speak only about his *supposed* real interests. 'A exercises power over B in B's real interests' in fact means A gets B to do something that is *supposed* to be in his real interests.

his conception of interests, is unsatisfactory. Probably the 'objectivist' version of 'interests' will be more logically coherent for it clearly distinguishes interests from preferences and wants, and makes it possible to avoid some of the contradictions mentioned above. Bilgrami (1976: 273), who appears to accept this view, agrees with Lukes that 'there are certain things which are in a people's interest even though, due to the exercise of 3D power, they do not realize that this is so'. But in contrast to Lukes, Bilgrami argues that 'these real interests are the universal and fundamental needs of human beings in terms of which human beings are functionally constituted. Any set of statements describing these basic needs in turn constitutes 'warrant-statements' for formulating certain values by which we judge human behaviour and the political organization of human societies'. The advantage of the objectivist notion of real interests, writes Bilgrami (1976: 272), is that it excuses us from looking 'either for directly articulated behavioural evidence or for indirect evidence to say that a human being has the 'basic' needs he does have . . . [and gives us] a non-behavioural criterion for finding out whether A affects B in a manner that warrants our saying that A exercises power over B'.

However, an objectivist approach creates other problems: it is inclined to provide 'a paternalistic licence for tyranny', it unjustifiably restricts the realm of power by excluding cases of 'short-term power' and limiting the sphere of 'the third dimension of power' because the notion of 'real interests' can be applied only to the most basic biological and psychological needs which are considered to be uncontroversially universal interests of people.

Thus, neither Lukes's conception of interests, nor an objectivist approach can

provide a logically coherent explanation of 'power' and its 'faces'. Although the shortcomings of these explanations are rather different they are, I think, predetermined by the very inclusion of 'interests' in the definition of power. It is evidently impossible to invent a 'new' notion of 'real interests' that would visibly differ from both Lukes's and objectivist versions and thereby avoid their defects.

The inclusion of 'interests' - A's acting against B's interests - in the definition of power creates difficulties and contradictions which can hardly be overcome. That is the reason why many scholars define power without reference to 'interests'. Here I completely agree with Kernohan who writes that Lukes

> is exactly right when he claims that an important form of power, perhaps the most important form of power, is that exercised through the formation of the perceived interests of those dominated. He is right that *B*'s subjective interests cannot be the baseline for detecting the exercise of power because they themselves may be the result of power. He is right that *B*'s theoretically determined objective interests cannot be the baseline for detecting A's power because of the contestability of the theory involved and the potential for paternalistic tyranny. He is right that *B*'s real interests are those which B would form when maximally independent of the power of others. But he is wrong to define power in terms of *B*'s real interests. In fact, . . . it is a mistake to define power in terms of B's interests at all, be they subjective, objective, or real. (Kernohan, 1989: 716)

One may say that the inclusion of 'interests' in the definition of power is necessary for the identification of 'the third dimension of power'. I think this is not true. Lukes's 'three-dimensional view' broadens the scope of power. The one- and two-dimensional views limit it by behaviour: A gets B to *act (behave* in a particular manner or deprive him of the ability to *act* in a particular manner. 'The three-dimensional view' allows cases where A gets B to *think* (believe, understand, want, evaluate, imagine, etc.) in a particular manner, or prevent him from thinking in a different way. In the one- and two-dimensional views A is responsible for B's thoughts. This can be taken into

consideration (without any loss of meaning) in a conception of power which does not include references to interests. In my view, power is best defined as *an ability of a powerholder to achieve the subject's submission with respect to a particular scope of his behaviour and/or consciousness in accordance with the powerholder's intention*. So power is exercised not only when the powerholder controls a subject's behaviour, but in cases where he shapes or determines a subject's wants, desires and thoughts no matter whether this is against subject's interests (preferences) or not.

It can further be argued that the inclusion of 'interests' in the concept of power allows the distinction between power (significant affecting) and other forms of influence (non-significant affecting) since when A acts against B's interests he influences B in a significant manner. This does not mean that 'interests' (adversely affected interests of B) can be *the only* criterion of a significant affecting. The references to intention, I think, are sufficient to distinguish between significant and insignificant affecting. Lukes rejects intentionality as a criterion of significant affecting and admits that a powerholder may exercise power unintentionally. In my view, this creates problems with the distinction between power and structural determination and allows us to speak of power in cases where both the powerholder and subject do not even imagine each other's existence. This, I think, contradicts common sense.

Furthermore, 'ability to harm someone's interests' and 'ability to get somebody to do something' are clearly not the same. There are cases where the powerholder completely controls the behaviour and consciousness of the subject (mother and child), but does not harm the subject's interests. Or vice versa: individuals can do a lot of harm to their opponents (even kill them) but be impotent to change their behaviour or consciousness in a desired direction. In many cases harming a subject's interests does

not necessarily lead to his submission and, therefore, cannot be, in my view, regarded as the exercise of power.

Power and conflict *often* come together. Conflict of interests is embedded in many forms of power. Sometimes the only purpose of exercising power is to harm other people's interests. The ability to harm interests can be a resource of power, an instrument of getting somebody to do something he would not otherwise do. The study of interests is an important element in the analysis of different forms of power, it helps to explain their sources, bases and peculiarities. But it does not mean that 'interests' are to be *included in the definition of power*. When we are interested in the study of cases where a powerholder acts against a subject's interests, we may adopt the definition of power where reference to interests is absent and then proceed to focus attention on these cases. Besides, all we want to say about power which results in a damaging of a subject's interests can be explained in terms of getting the subject's *submission*: A can get B to act in a particular way that would harm B's interests; or: A can get B not to resist A's acts that would harm B's interests; or: A prohibits B from acting in a way that would benefit B.[15]

Exclusion of 'conflict' and 'interests' from 'power' has, above all, two 'practical' advantages over the conceptions in which they are present. First, it deprives power of its negative connotations that pervade popular discussions of power. Power becomes both 'negative' and 'positive', its consequences lead both to suffering and gain for subordinates and its exercise may be both approved of or blamed. Second, it makes the concept of power less value-dependent (even value-independent?). Lukes considers 'power' to be "ineradicably evaluative" since it is based on the notion of 'interest'.

[15] For more detailed explanation of my conception of power see: Ledyaev (1997).

Exclusion of ‘interests’ from the definition of power excludes the main reason for speaking of power as an ‘essentially contested’ concept.

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