

# The conditions of action, power and the problem of interests

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## Abstract

It is argued that the problem of 'structure and agency' should be reconsidered as the problem of 'fate and agency' (or event causation and agency causation). The problem of fate and agency is addressed by outlining a model of the conditions of action derived from work by Giddens and Wright Mills. The model uses the concepts of different forms of knowledge and of the unintended consequence to set up a framework by which it should, in principle, be possible to decide which outcomes are the product of agency and which are the product of fate or events.

This framework is then used to discuss the problems raised by defining power in terms of interests. It is argued that this definition is inadequate and suggested that a definition of power based on access to resources and causal responsibility for outcomes may be more useful.

This paper is addressed to three questions that are conceptually distinct but nonetheless linked to a common theme, the degree to which human society is a product of human agency and the degree to which it is not. That is, the questions raised either bear on, or derive from, the set of problems that have been commonly referred to as the 'structure/agency' debate in social theory.

In the first section I argue, briefly, that the use of the word 'structure' in this context, as an antonym for agency, is ambiguous and that a substitute must be found. 'Fate' or 'event causation' are suggested as alternatives. In the second section I develop a model of conditions of action which could, in principle, allow us to distinguish those historical outcomes that are a product of agency from those that are not. In the third I apply this framework to the problems inherent in defining power in terms of interest. I argue finally that, though the attempt undoubtedly raises new difficulties,

the particular problems inherent in defining power in terms of interests would be resolved if power were defined in terms of causation.

## **1 Event causation and social structures**

When we describe the problem of the degree to which society is the outcome of conscious and intentional activity, and the degree to which it is not, as the problem of 'structure and agency' we prejudice our chances of analysing and understanding it. This is because the word 'structure' can be, and has been, used as a label for two different concepts.<sup>1</sup> And, unless we confront this, conceptual and terminological muddles will add to the very real difficulties involved in coming to terms with the underlying theoretical problem.

That is, 'structure' can be used to mean pre-existing contexts and situations, the 'rules and resources' structuring social action,<sup>1</sup> but it is also used to refer to those outcomes of human activity that have been produced without conscious planning (as is sometimes implied when we talk of 'structural tendencies', 'structural laws', or 'structural contradictions'). And it is not the case that a contextual constraint or a contextual possibility<sup>2</sup> and an unintended outcome of that constraint or possibility can be usefully considered to be one and the same thing. Contexts may be built up by a series of unintended outcomes, and an unintended outcome may have the effect of constraining, or enabling, future behaviour, but these are contingent questions. The idea of a context and the idea of an unintended outcome are different and if we use 'structure' to represent one of these concepts we necessarily preclude its use as a label for the other. It is not useful, or even sensible, to use the same word to refer both to a presumed cause and to some of its presumed effects. In fact it is simply confusing to use the word 'structure' to refer both to the constraints and opportunities present in social contexts and to some of the presumed effects of behaviour situated in these contexts, that is to the unintended outcomes of human behaviour.

In this paper the word 'structure' is confined to the first set of meanings, that is to contextual constraints and opportunities, rules and resources, and other terminology is used to refer to the unintended, unforeseen consequences that may flow from actions and behaviour situated in these contexts. Though we could avoid

the problem by talking of the 'unintended and unforeseen effects of behaviour and action shaped by structural factors', it is simpler to use the terms presented by Mills<sup>3</sup> and by Giddens<sup>4</sup> in work that will be discussed below. That is, it is simpler to use the words 'fate' or 'event causation' to refer to outcomes produced without conscious human agency, without discursive intention or fore-knowledge.<sup>5</sup>

In fact 'structure' is most commonly used in the first sense. That is, if we say that 'there are structural factors operating here' what we usually mean is that there are situational constraints, or situational possibilities, affecting outcomes (regardless of whether discursive decision making is involved or not).<sup>6</sup> The second sense is normally only employed when the 'structure/agency' problem is the specific focus of attention. But if we decide, as I believe we should, to exercise the second meaning in the interests of clarity, we need to find a different label for what is in fact a very real theoretical problem. That is, we need to find a name for the problem concerning the extent to which people are affecting social processes by conscious decision making, and the extent to which they are simply overwhelmed by events, and are the creatures of history rather than its creators. For present purposes I am going to call this problem the problem of event causation and agency causation or, more simply, the problem of fate and agency.

Let us now consider a model of the conditions of action, in the hope that it may shed some light not on the problem of 'structure and agency' but on the problem of fate and agency. And then go on to apply the model to the problems posed by defining power in terms of human intentions, and the difficulties this creates in terms of the notion of 'real interests' and its necessary corollary, 'false consciousness' (as well as those presented by conspiracy theories and the dark pit of the teleological trap).

## **2 The conditions of action**

The problem of fate and agency is, and has been, a central problem for social theorists. It is also a recurrent problem in everyday life. This is continually demonstrated in questions like: Were they to blame? Could he help himself? Should she take the credit? Was he a victim of circumstances? Did they do that on purpose? All questions of this kind are questions about fate and

agency, or event causation and agency causation. In the past, different sociological perspectives have tended to opt rather heavily for one of the two poles. On the one hand, some have outlined a determinist set of explanations for human society in which individual will and intentional behaviour were dominated by historical laws or functional imperatives and, in themselves, played little part. While, in contrast, others have rejected such explanations and have strongly emphasized the subjective understanding and intentional behaviour of individual social actors.

For the determinist, the wishes, desires and subjective understanding of individual participants in society had little causal significance and were, at best, merely symptoms of deeper processes that were beyond their control. On the other hand, for the humanist, these same symptoms and epiphenomena were to be taken in a very different light and given serious attention as the central and proper focus of sociological study, and as the first cause of human action. To describe the debate in this schematic way is, of course, to set up a pair of ideal types to which few theorists may exactly conform. But examples of the former could, in some form, be found in the work both of many marxist scholars (for example, most recently, Althusser and Poulantzas) and among the more positivistically inclined empiricists of the functionalist school. Among the latter we could place those who have worked within the phenomenological movement derived from Husserl and Schutz, together with many existentialists, ethno-methodologists, and symbolic interactionists.

The question has taken its place as one of the central problems of social theory and, as this paper will go on to argue, its resolution is necessary before a range of theoretical (and practical) problems, including those concerning the nature of power, can be adequately addressed. I can agree with Hindess that attempts to account for human society either exclusively in terms of event causation or exclusively in terms of agency, should be dismissed as reductionist,<sup>7</sup> in the sense that they inevitably force some of the phenomena into an inappropriate category. But I cannot agree with him when he argues that attempts to combine the two concepts compound the 'reductionism'.<sup>8</sup> To maintain that one set of phenomena have something in common (in the present case, that they were or were not the product of conscious and intentional activity) is not to maintain that they have everything in common. In opposing the attempt to combine agency and fate in theory building Hindess appears to have changed the meaning of 'reductionism' from

'misclassification' to encompass the whole principle of classification itself. But without some principle of classification every concept employed in systematic thinking about the world dissolves.

In fact positions that combine the two principles are probably now quite common. That is, few serious scholars would now work with explicit perspectives that either completely dismiss agency or completely deny the possibility of event causation. But, if the working assumption is that both events and agency play some part in human affairs, the problem becomes which part do they play and how do we know?

The model of the conditions of action that will be discussed here could help us with this problem. It is not, of course, exclusively, or even mainly, my own. Principally, it derives from the work of two theorists, Anthony Giddens<sup>10</sup> and C. Wright Mills.<sup>11</sup> But, in a number of respects it diverges from, changes, or reinterprets what they have to say. For the sake of clarity I will simply present it in the form in which it makes most sense to me rather than discussing the origins of its component concepts in any detail.

First, however, it should be made clear what is meant by agency. I am not talking about freedom in any absolute sense, but rather of the concept of conscious choice. A choice between two disagreeable alternatives (like 'would you prefer to die by fire or the sword?') is not freedom. But it is a choice. And conscious choices, even if they are tightly constrained, play havoc with determinist models of society. This is because while we can predict what the outcome of a constrained choice is *likely* to be, we cannot know with certainty. Here, then, a set of circumstances will be considered to be the result of agency causation if it is the anticipated result of conscious human decisions. And, in as much as it is not the anticipated result of conscious human decision making, it is considered to be the result of fate, or of event causation.<sup>11</sup>

The model developed here depends on the rather simple idea that sometimes people know what they are doing and sometimes they do not. (Though I go on to argue that if this statement is thought through systematically, the theoretical consequences can be quite far reaching.) But, before outlining the model itself, it may be helpful to discuss the two concepts that are crucial to it. The first is the idea of knowledge, that is of the kind of understanding that people have of the context in which they act and of the probable consequences of their actions. For it is only possible to say that agency is an important causal factor in a given situation if the people involved in creating it knew what they were

doing. An architect plans a house and supervises its construction. In as much as it is built according to his plan it is an outcome of agency causation. On the other hand, thousands of people stop buying butter and switch to margarine because they are afraid of heart disease. One consequence of this switch is that a number of dairy farmers are ruined and the profits of a margarine company are increased. The people who changed their eating habits created this situation in the sense that they were causally responsible for it, but they did not plan it. They did not know that they were doing it. Therefore it would not be sensible to call the situation an outcome of agency causation.

This second example introduces the second concept, the idea of the *unintended consequence*. Many of our actions have unintended and unforeseen consequences, and these can have a powerful effect on social life. The ideal type of the free market is a complex, unplanned structure, almost entirely created by a mesh of clashing and conflicting unintended consequences.<sup>12</sup> But this does not mean that it is not a human product. A myriad actors, each with little personal power, made it and contribute to its maintenance with no conscious intent. Similarly, the age/sex structure of a population is the *unintended outcome* of the behaviour of many people, some of whom intended to have children, or to refrain from having children, but very few of whom intended to influence the structure of the population. Nonetheless, their behaviour has this effect. The scope of the unintended consequence is not, however, confined to the combined mass of the small actions of a multitude of people.<sup>13</sup> The actions of a minority who have access to a disproportionate share of social resources may also have unintended consequences. For example, a handful of people centrally located in the national power structure of Australia may decide to enter into a military alliance to protect the country from the communist menace and the teeming North. And, an unintended consequence of this is that Australia becomes a prime nuclear target.

The idea of the unintended consequence is a key concept if we wish to make a distinction between agency causation and event causation. An outcome that is unintended and unforeseen cannot be a result of agency, but most, perhaps all, actions have unintended consequences.<sup>14</sup> And these are of considerable importance to social theory, both because they are heavily involved in the reproduction of institutions,<sup>15</sup> and because causal generalizations in the social sciences depend upon 'reproduced alignments of

unintended consequences'.<sup>16</sup> The prevalence of the unintended consequence also means, as Popper has pointed out, that however well we understand human subjectivity, however well we understand the perceptions and orientations of human actors, we can never reduce sociology to a sum of individual psychologies.<sup>17</sup> Indeed he argues that the study of the unintended consequence should be the proper focus of the social sciences.<sup>18</sup>

The model, outlined in schematic form in Figure 1 is, then, built on the concepts of knowledge and the unintended consequence. But 'knowledge' in particular does need to be elaborated.

First, it should be understood in the sense of what people believe to be true rather than in the sense of what may in fact be empirically the case. This means that, as a corollary, 'ignorance' must be understood simply as the state of having no thoughts on the matter (rather than as having thoughts which are wrong). It is, of course, rather a nice distinction because if we are wrong this will mean, in effect, that there are aspects of the situation about which we have no thoughts. (And even if the knowledge that we have is right, it will probably be incomplete.)

But there are good reasons for using a sociological rather than an epistemological definition of knowledge. Testing whether a belief is or is not empirically sound is time consuming and necessarily inconclusive. Moreover, much of the knowledge on which social action is based is not subjected to careful empirical tests by the people who are using it, and it is not often particularly useful for the sociologist who is trying to understand their activity to test it either. (It is probable, however, that action based on false premisses is liable to a wider range of unintended consequences than action based on premisses which are more nearly correct.)

But the model does not depend simply on the idea of knowledge and ignorance. Knowledge comes in two forms. That is, it may be tacit or discursive. (This distinction is taken from Giddens, 1979, and it is one that is crucial.)<sup>19</sup> What is tacit knowledge? All knowledge at the least involves knowledge of the constraints and possibilities shaping the context of social action. Tacit knowledge is that knowledge that we have of contexts and of consequences that we do not know in a self-aware sense. We are not consciously aware that we know it. Giddens calls the kind of consciousness that is based on tacit knowledge 'practical consciousness'.

Goffman is very good at showing us this kind of knowledge being acted on, at describing human activity based on 'practical consciousness'. Its essence is that it is unreflecting. If an actor who

*Unacknowledged  
conditions of action*

Behaviour based on these kinds of understandings is a product of 'event causation' or 'fate'.

The actor could not, logically, have chosen to have done otherwise.

Contextual constraints and possibilities (structural factors) shape outcomes. Our capacity to predict and explain is limited only by our knowledge of the context.

*The unknown* (ignorance)  
– includes aspects of contexts of which we are ignorant and unintended, unforeseen consequences  
*Tacitly known* contexts and consequences ('practical consciousness')  
– knowledge is implicit. We are not able to explain in words what we are doing and why.

*Acknowledged  
conditions of action*

Actions based on understanding of this kind is the product of 'agency causation.'

The actor could, logically, have chosen to have done otherwise.

While contextual constraints and possibilities may, in fact, make a range of actions and outcomes relatively predictable, there is nothing inevitable about this.

*Discursively known* contexts and consequences ('discursive consciousness'), including unintended consequences that are foreseen.  
– knowledge is explicit. We can talk about it, introspect about it, and can articulate reasons for actions based on it.

**Figure 1.** A model of the conditions of action



is deferring to another of higher status with quiet smiles and gestures of approval is challenged and asked why he is behaving in this way he may be unable to account for his behaviour and explain it. In a similar way, many abortion patients interviewed by Yvonne Lucire<sup>21</sup> were unable to explain why they had not used contraception. This should be seen not as a reflection of a neurosis, as Lucire interprets it, but of the difficulty of explaining behaviour based on a combination of ignorance and conflicting tacit understandings.<sup>21</sup>

Tacit knowledge is involved in many of the things people do to preserve their self esteem, to avoid wounds to the ego, to protect their own claims to prestige, as well, sometimes, as the claims of others. But it is not confined to the arena of impression management. Giddens does not provide many examples, but he is particularly fascinated by grammar. This example in itself illustrates the way in which contemporary discussions of 'structure' and agency have become bound up with the movement called 'structuralism'. This is derived from the work of linguists like Saussure and Chomsky and uses language not simply as an example of a systematic set of rules and resources, but as a semiological prototype providing an understanding of laws that may be applied to other systems of meaning (texts, myths, social interaction, fashion and so on).<sup>22</sup> Anti-phenomenologists as diverse as Althusser, Foucault, Lacan, and Lévi-Strauss have all chosen language, a system which limits consciousness and which we can use without understanding its principles, as an illustration for their own particular kinds of determinism.<sup>23</sup>

Here, however, it serves not as a structural prototype but as an example of tacit knowledge. That is, all competent social actors know how to speak grammatically, within the norms of their linguistic reference group, but most of us cannot explain the rules. And even grammarians do not consciously apply them when they speak. The knowledge is implicit, not explicit.

But tacit knowledge is not simply of the 'how to' nature. It is not just normative.<sup>24</sup> Much of our very basic taken-for-granted cognitive knowledge is also tacit. We are not aware that we know it. The central attribute of tacit knowledge, then, is that it is implicit. And much of the knowledge that is drawn on in social behaviour may be known at this level: grammar, norms of interaction, taken for granted definitions of situations. Actors know what they are doing and monitor their behaviour in the light of this knowledge without being aware of the fact of their

knowledge. This means that they could not, at least without some thought, express in words what they are doing, and why. And, it also means that they could not, logically, choose to do otherwise. They are responding to events: they are not making choices. Consequently, action that is based on tacit knowledge cannot be understood as the result of agency.

In contrast, discursive knowledge is knowledge that we are aware of knowing. People know about the context in which they are acting, the constraints on their actions, and they are aware that they know these things. If the constraints are severe, their behaviour may be relatively predictable but we can never be certain that they will always behave in the way that the constraints appear to push them. People who know what they are doing in an explicit way can always choose to do otherwise.

The three stages of not knowing and of knowing, ignorance, tacit knowledge, and discursive knowledge, apply also to our understanding of consequences. That is, many of the consequences of human activities are unknown to the actors who produce them. They are ignorant of them or they only know about them in a tacit, unreflecting sense. It is not possible for people to choose to refrain from producing consequences of which they are discursively unaware.

On the other hand, action may have consequences that are unintended but which are nonetheless known in a discursive sense. For example, we may come to know that buying supermarket eggs supports the battery system, and knowing this we may choose to change what we do. Though in practice it may be hard to determine whether a given unintended consequence was or was not foreseen,<sup>25</sup> in principle unintended consequences that are foreseen must be understood in terms of agency. This is not put forward as a moral point (though it obviously could be) but as a point of logic. For no matter how strong the inconvenience, how severe the constraints, when unintended consequences of action can be foreseen people are in a position to choose to avert them. They are no longer in the grip of events; they can, if not control, at least alter their fate.

For the sake of simplicity, this discussion has presented an overly dichotomous picture of fate and agency. In practice, most sets of outcomes will be a consequence of a mix of both agency and of event causation, and the relative contribution of the two elements will be a complex empirical question. Nevertheless, we can summarise the model in the following way. When action is

based in ignorance or in tacit knowledge, and when consequences are unintended and unforeseen, the conditions of action are unacknowledged. The outcome of such action is a product of events, of the blind drift of fate. On the other hand, when action is based on a discursive knowledge of contexts, and of consequences, we are looking at agency. And, the possibility of our predicting outcomes is limited, not simply by our ignorance of the full context, that is of the range of possible causes, but by the ever present possibility that the people involved may change what they decide to do. The limits of determinism are set by discursive understanding.

Is finding an answer to the problem of fate and agency anything more than an intellectual game? I think it is. This particular answer may be too simple, partial, wrong, or unworkable, but an answer of some kind could help resolve a range of theoretical problems. That is, obviously a direct empirical application of this model of the conditions of action would present many difficulties, and there might not, in fact, be a great deal to be gained by trying to develop an 'index of tacit/discursive understanding' or a 'co-efficient of intentionality'. Its usefulness, if any, lies with its capacity to assist theory building. For example, as we have seen, some answer to the problem of fate and agency is necessary before we can know where it is sensible to look for causal generalizations in attempting to explain social life, and where it is more sensible to look for explanations specific to a particular set of circumstances and a particular set of actors. That is, an answer is necessary if we are to construct theories about society that do not depend either on conspiracies or on notions of historical or functional inevitability.

Moreover, an answer something like the one outlined above could be used to describe more clearly the role of reformers, who do not wish to impose solutions but rather try to help people make sense of their own circumstances and to realise their own goals. For, in fact, what they are doing is trying to push back the unacknowledged conditions of action and draw a wider scope of social life into a widening circle of discursive understanding and human agency. But, most of all, an answer of some kind is necessary if we are to pursue what Mills calls the central goal of Western Humanism, 'the audacious control by reason of man's fate'.<sup>20</sup> If we are to be able to turn events into agency, or, in Mills' terms, to turn 'fate' into the 'politics of the explicit decision' we must be able to tell the one from the other. In particular, for Mills, seizing control of fate means tracking and capturing the unintended consequence.

forcing it into the light of discursive understanding, and compelling power elites and attentive publics to address it as agency not destiny.

But, understanding must precede effective change. Too often, misconceptions about fate and agency cloud our understanding of power and, by confusing causal responsibility with moral responsibility, allow social analysis to deteriorate into moral evaluation and condemnation. An understanding of power has been particularly handicapped by confusion about event causation and agency causation, that is by conceptual confusion concerning the role of human intention in shaping human affairs. In the third part of this paper the concepts developed above will be drawn on in a discussion that will, first, explore some of these confusions and, second, attempt to formulate a definition of power that can resolve them.

The argument, in brief, will be that definitions of power that are exclusively based on a concept of human intentionality are inadequate for two main reasons: they cannot address the role of power in producing unintended outcomes<sup>27</sup> and, however the notion of intentionality is expressed, they are irretrievably flawed by the problem of 'interests'. A definition of power based on the idea of causal responsibility for outcomes, though it may present new difficulties, resolves these problems principally because it is compatible with a model of the conditions of action that considers both event and agency causation.

### **3 Interests and power**

Many theories about power are based on the concept of interests.<sup>28</sup> This is especially true of those that are predicated on Weber's classic definition of power as 'the chance of a man or of a number of men to realise their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action'. For what is 'their own will' but their own perceptions of their interests in a particular situation? Of course, for many purposes, there is a difference in meaning between 'interest' and 'intention', and indeed in shades of meaning between 'interest', 'preferences', 'want' and 'objective'.<sup>29</sup> But, as far as an understanding of power is concerned all these terms either share the common characteristic of intentionality, be it discursive or tacit, or if they are used without it become both teleological and meaningless.

## **Interests and event causation**

How, in the first place, are we to proceed with a definition of power based on 'interests' in circumstances where people do not have a discursive awareness of the ends that their behaviour serves? One strategy is to assume that the ends achieved are, nonetheless, those that are in the interests of the powerful. But the most cursory examination of this proposition discloses the teleological fallacy on which it is based. That is, this strategy both locates the powerful and discovers their 'interests' by examining outcomes. And this is logically false for we cannot, in the absence of intentional planning, discover causes by examining effects. We may, however, wish to consider outcomes that are the result of behaviour based on tacit knowledge and which are foreseen in a tacit sense in a different category. But the problems involved in defining 'real' interests, which are discussed in the following section with respect to discursively known wants and goals, apply also at the tacit level. And, more than this, there is the added empirical difficulty that people cannot, by definition, tell us about their tacitly known wants and goals.<sup>31</sup>

This subset of event causation aside, it is necessarily the case that where outcomes are unintended and unforeseen an explanation couched in terms of 'interests' is teleological. This means that we cannot talk of interests in any Weberian sense of people 'realising their own will' when they have no understanding of the context in which they are acting or of the consequences of their actions. This has already been discussed in the context of some economic behaviour, child bearing, and the use of language. When we go to work (or attempt to find it), shop, or pay the rates, we are not discursively intending to maintain an economic system. When we speak we do not usually, at a discursive level, consciously intend to reproduce the grammar of our language. In as much as structures can be enabling as well as constraining, an observer might say that the preservation of a language, or an economy, or a given population structure, was 'in our interests'. But these ends are usually not ones of which we are aware when we are engaged in the activities that produce them.

How might an analysis that was sensitive to the role of event causation in the production of social life proceed?

Richard Dawkins has written an engaging, popular work on evolution, *The Selfish Gene*,<sup>31</sup> in which he argues that genes, not individuals or populations, are the fundamental units of biological

selection. But, he ends with a chapter on 'memes'. Here he argues that the same principles of selection that constrain animals and plants as biological forms can be applied to culture. A 'meme' is a unit of culture (be it a Romanesque arch, a piece of slang, a gesture, a recipe, an aspect of technology) and it makes its way in the cultural pool in much the same way as a gene for resisting antibiotics or for building better quadriceps makes its way in the gene pool.

While there are problems with this idea, especially with defining a 'unit of culture',<sup>32</sup> I think that it can nonetheless help us to understand how human society can be made and remade at the level of event causation. Words, habits, and practices can be learnt at the tacit level, and used at the tacit level (as, for example, when we copy the speech habits of a cult hero, or simply continue to live out the traditional life style of our immediate social group). Here elements of culture are selected for objectification and disseminated without the intervention of discursive consciousness, and without the possibility of human choice. But there is nothing random about this process, and there is certainly nothing 'natural' about it. It is a social process. It is in fact the process Weber is describing when he writes of the 'elective affinity' of ideas<sup>33</sup> or that Bachrach and Baratz are referring to when they write about 'incremental decision making' or 'decisionless decisions'.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, whenever we speak of an institution 'evolving' (as opposed to being planned) it must be something of this kind that we mean.

The biological process of natural selection involves 'The non-random differential reproduction of genes'.<sup>35</sup> The production and reproduction of social practices at the level of event causation can be seen as a non-random process of cultural selection, where selection pressures stem, not from the pre-existing ecological environment alone, but from ecological and social conditions together. And, like biological evolution, the process depends on the power of veto. For example, if a practice produces consequences that disturb people they are likely to try to act in such a way as may prevent a repetition, and they will be more likely to be able to do this if they stand in a favourable relationship to the rules and resources structuring social action. If, on the other hand, the consequences have no effect on them, or are actually beneficial, they will either do nothing or act in a helpful and facilitative way, and the practices will be more likely to be sustained and reproduced. The landlord will not prevent you from paying the rent and the teacher will not punish you for speaking grammatically.

Or, to express this notion of cultural selection in other words, we could say that ideas and practices that are functional to the more powerful are more likely to be objectified and disseminated than ideas and practices that are not.<sup>36</sup>

Dawkins' memes may help us to visualize the processes by which unintended consequences are reproduced, ignorance maintained, and tacit knowledge selected and objectified. And, they can help us to visualize the process by which social structures may both affect outcomes, and themselves be reproduced, at the level of event causation, as well as suggest ways in which this process may be biased towards those who already stand in a favourable relationship to valued things. The concept of interests in the sense of people pursuing conscious goals only serves to obscure the process.<sup>37</sup>

### **Interests and agency causation**

What, then, of agency causation? The first difficulty with a definition based on 'interests' is, as we have seen, that it ignores event causation, or uses teleological arguments to circumvent it. But if we reject these strategies and retain the definition we are, *de facto*, left with the proposition that all outcomes are the result of agency. Even with the most enthusiastic endorsement of conspiracy theory this proposition seems implausible.

Nevertheless, if we put the problems of event causation temporarily to one side, and consider only those outcomes that are a consequence of agency causation, is it, in this limited area, possible to use a definition of power based on interests?

Presumably we can talk here of interests in a conventional sense: we can talk of people's aims, wants and desires and of their success in achieving the goals that these wants and desires imply. But, nonetheless, we are still left with the dilemma that this definition of interests has always provoked. That is, if we use the definitions that people themselves provide of what their interests are, if we accept these and go no further, we are obliged to rule out the concept of ideological control or false consciousness. If we accept this point of view we must accept that people know what their interests are, and that we can measure their power in terms of their success in realising them. For example, if some people feel that their interests lie with resisting liberation, with achieving the goals presented to them by the consumer society, with drinking

themselves to death, or with giving their money to the Hare Krishnas, it is not our place to say that they are mistaken.

On the other hand, we can try to start with an 'objective' definition of interests. We can say that, as observers, we know that a desire for heroin, high fashion, and hand held home computers are false needs. People who think that their interests lie with goals involving access to these ends have been subverted. If they in fact achieve these ends, or spend their lives in at least winning battles in the struggle to do so, we will see this not as evidence of their power over their circumstances, but as evidence of someone else's power over them. We will look for the hidden persuader. But doing this means discounting agency, asserting that in some way the choices that were made were not 'real choices'. But agency is not about 'authentic' choices, or 'real freedom'. It is simply about conscious decision making, no matter how severely constrained. If he believes that a death by fire will purge his sins and ensure a swift entry into paradise, a man may choose to die by fire rather than by the sword. We may say that his beliefs are nonsense, but he has still chosen. And our theories about his action should not assume that he has not. Reducing agency to event causation is wrong, not in a moral sense, but in an empirical sense. Action grounded in discursive consciousness is both reflexive and intentional, and it cannot be understood in terms of the mindless working out of fate.

But, more than this, the 'objective' definition also poses a larger, logical problem. How is it that the observer, who is also a member of society, buffeted by all the ideological winds and social pressures that beset her fellows, how is it that she can arrive at an 'objective' definition of interests, and know that others are suffering from false consciousness, when they themselves cannot do this? How can we tell that this observer's diagnosis of the situation, and her statement of what people's interests ought to be, is not itself an attempt to impose an alternative dogma on the unresisting victims of circumstances?<sup>36</sup> The answer is that we cannot. Interests can only be tested as sensible or misguided when they are construed in an intermediate sense as a means to a given end.<sup>37</sup> In this sense we can say whether they will advance that end or not. But when it comes to the authenticity of interests as ultimate ends, we have no way of knowing whether a want or need that another human being professes is false and contrary to their 'real interests' in some way that is hidden from them. The contest is simply one of our values against theirs.<sup>38</sup>

The problems of basing a definition of power on some variant of



the notion of people's differential ability to realise their intentions, or interests, may be summarised in the following way.

The difficulty is, for the most part, clear in the case of event causation. This is so whether the theory employed is determinist (based on an assumption of universal event causation) or whether it allows for some mix of event and agency causation. For, in so far as a notion of 'interests' is applied to account for outcomes that were unintended and unforeseen, it is teleological. (This is not necessarily so where outcomes are foreseen at the tacit level, but the same difficulties that apply to a definition based on discursively known interests at the level of agency apply here.)

If, on the other hand, theory is based on a universal assumption of agency causation we are left with the empirically implausible idea of all-embracing conspiracy. If, however, as is argued here, social outcomes are to be best understood as a product of both event and agency causation, we are not obliged to assume conspiracy where there is none. Nevertheless, further intractable problems remain. That is, the attempt to apply a definition of power based on an intention to achieve known goals to that subset of outcomes which are the result of agency produces two major difficulties.

On the one hand, if interests are self ascribed any concept of ideological control or influence must be eliminated from social theory. (And any reformist project of helping people to push back the unacknowledged conditions of action, make the tacit discursive, and dispel ignorance, becomes redundant.) If, on the other hand, interests are to be other ascribed a definition of power based on the concept is absurd; people can be redefined as unreflecting dupes at the convenience of the observer, and any attempt to distinguish agency from fate is meaningless.

While the definition clearly cannot be used either with theories that are exclusively determinist or exclusively concerned with agency, this conclusion has little bearing on the present theme. What is crucial here is that it also cannot be used within a theoretical framework that attempts to combine both event and agency causation. And, while the particular model of the conditions of action presented in section two may be rejected, the principle on which it is based cannot be easily overturned. That is, any theory which is to present some useful approximation of the real circumstances of human society must allow for both fate and agency in its starting assumptions.

The definition of power presented below is based on the concept

of causal responsibility for outcomes.<sup>41</sup> Though it is not without difficulties of its own, it has the virtue that it resolves the problems presented by a definition based on interests, and that it is compatible with the principle that both fate and agency play a part in human affairs.

### **Outcomes and power**

A given set of outcomes (a university, an economy, a language, an immigration policy) may not, as we have seen, be adequately explained in every instance, solely in terms of the discursively acknowledged aims and goals of social actors. The outcomes may be affected by processes that the participants were unaware of and did not plan, and, even where aims and goals are realised in achieved outcomes these aims themselves have a history and may involve something we would like to call ideological bias or ideological manipulation. Indeed, the most effective forms of ideological control may well involve the very processes that operate to keep the unacknowledged conditions of action unacknowledged, and prevent the relatively powerless from gaining a discursive understanding of their circumstances.

Certainly, it can be argued that people are more likely to achieve a given end if this end is in fact a conscious goal and one that they fully intend to reach. Though it is impossible to base a satisfactory definition of power on interests so defined, it would be foolish to eliminate them from the analysis of power. 'Wanting' and 'knowing' are very much bound up with efficacy in achieving ends, but not as a matter of logical necessity. In fact, in any one instance, some particular mix of agency and event causation will be found to have produced a given array of outcomes and the relative contribution of each will be an empirical question.

Rather than saying that the powerful are those who are able to realise their interests in communal action, let us say that the powerful are those who stand in a favourable relationship to socially valued things, to the rules and resources structuring social action. And, that this will mean that they are likely to be causally responsible for a greater range of outcomes than others who are not so well placed. Power, then, is a potential to cause social outcomes. It derives from the relationship between people and social contexts and includes negative selection by power of veto.

While the merit of such a definition lies in the fact that it does not depend on any concept of human intentionality (though it may of course include it), I am aware that it begs the question of all the problems associated with the idea of causation. That is, any given event is preceded by a host of possible causes (both necessary and sufficient) and it may not be possible to say which of them is *the* cause. And even an attempt to arrange them in a hierarchy of significance may create substantial problems.

These problems cannot be addressed here at any length and the following discussion of a definition of power based on some notion of causation is, therefore, tentative. Clearly, however, such a definition requires us to at least consider the problem of a hierarchy of causes. And it may be the case that the concept of veto, which was crucial in exploring the way in which power may be exercised at the level of event causation, can be useful here where both event and agency causation are at issue.

That is, if we ask who could have vetoed this process, and how easily could he, she, or they, have done so, we may be able to come to grips with the problem. And, in any organizational hierarchy those located nearer the leadership will usually find it easier to veto ideas and practices than those more remotely placed. This means that a definition of the kind outlined here would be compatible with existing theories of bureaucracy, organizations, and power elites.

For example, the Australian Ministers for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, by virtue of their access to bureaucratic and political resources, have had a greater effect on Australia's immigration policy than the leaders of the ethnic communities, and they in turn have had a greater effect than the average Australian voter. And, given the shifting range of the unacknowledged conditions of action, we can say that a group of actors are causally responsible for an array of outcomes without saying that they necessarily intended to produce the outcomes that they caused. For example, the Australian Labor Party's response to the demands of Southern European community leaders for increased family reunion was causally responsible for the present increased intake of Asian migrants in Australia. But this is an outcome that neither the Labor Party nor the Southern European community leaders intended.<sup>42</sup> And we could say that the Minister for Immigration could have vetoed the change in policy more easily than any one leader of the ethnic communities, and that any one ethnic leader had more potential to at least organize a collective

veto among the other ethnic leaders than any one voter among other voters.

The model of the conditions of action suggests that when we are asking questions about power we should not necessarily be asking only (or even primarily) about people's intentions, but rather we should be asking questions about which people are causally responsible for a given set of circumstances and about the processes by which they engendered them.

This view of power, then, would look primarily at access to resources and causal responsibility for outcomes, and treat conscious intention simply as a variable that might or might not be present. How could it help us to escape from the dilemma of interests? In the first place it would allow us to leave intact the conventional definition of 'interests' as the wants and desires that people say they have. It has become a very much less central concept and consequently doubts that observers may have about the moral worth of these wants and desires will be less disabling. So, wants and desires and interests are simply those aspirations that people hold at a discursive level.

When power is defined in terms of interests, statements about causation are hopelessly entangled with evaluations of the desirability of outcomes: the present definition would allow us to disentangle them. This means that we could evaluate outcomes in any terms that we wished, including those of the expressed wants and desires of the people engaged in the action. It would allow us to put to one side the question of how they acquired these aspirations, and to look at the range of outcomes and simply ask: did they achieve them? That is, we could look at outcomes and ask questions about gains and losses as these terms are conventionally defined by the people who experience them. Who achieved their goals and who failed to do so?

On the other hand, we could also look at outcomes in terms of ends that we as observers may think important, even if few of the participants endorse our views, or the assumptions on which they are based, or indeed are even aware of them. For example, we could ask: Are the existing range of outcomes producing greater social equality? Are they maximising human welfare? Are they tending to ensure or undermine the goal of human survival in a dangerous, restricted, and eroding biosphere? We could ask these questions without at the same time having to assume that other people should share our concerns and that, if they do not, they

must have been manipulated and rendered incapable of making choices. But, when we were asking why this particular range of outcomes had come about we would not have to exclude ideology, that is the effects of beliefs and ideas, and the degree to which the conditions of action are acknowledged or unacknowledged, from the answer. It is possible to accept that ideological biases may shape conflicts and influence outcomes without redefining agents who make decisions as puppets who do not.

If we were to examine outcomes in this way we would not need to assume that our criteria were self evidently and absolutely right, in the sense that they were the only ones that a sane man or woman could hold, and that therefore those who did not share our convictions must have been corrupted. Neither, in taking this position, would we be surrendering to relativism and subjectivism. All we would be saying is that, measured against this particular criterion, be it greater equality, greater welfare, or the maximisation of the chances of human survival, this range of outcomes indicates that these people are gaining on this dimension and these are losing (or, in terms of the last criterion, all are losing).

Because the definition of power does not rest on interests and therefore does not rest on questions of value, we could use questions of value to assess outcomes. And, concentrating as it does on causal responsibility rather than moral responsibility, it would allow us to focus on explanation rather than blame. This would not be to say that moral judgements were eliminated, but rather that the chances of their clouding our understanding would be reduced.

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Notes

- 1 See A. Giddens, *Studies in Social and Political Theory*, New York, Basic Books, 1977, p. 188, and A. Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory*, London, Macmillan, 1979, p. 64.
- 2 I owe to Giddens the insight that structures, considered in the sense of pre-existing contexts, or as 'rules and resources' structuring social action, may be enabling as well as constraining. See A. Giddens, *New Rules of Sociological Method*, London, Hutchinson, 1976, p. 161. I do not, however, accept his edict that we should no longer talk of 'structures' but of 'structuration'. (See Giddens, 1977, *op. cit.*, pp. 117–18.) Actors have the potential to draw on the rules and resources structuring social action, they may not necessarily do so. 'Structure', in the sense of a pre-existing contextual constraint or possibility, refers to a potential, not to its use.
- 3 C. W. Mills, *The Causes of World War Three*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1958.
- 4 Giddens, 1979, *op. cit.*
- 5 The confusion between the two meanings of 'structure' probably only becomes apparent when theory tries to come to grips with both agency and 'not agency'. If the model being defended is exclusively determinist the connection between pre-existing contexts, that is available rules and resources, and social outcomes is unproblematic. The context determines the outcome. But, if theory tries to take account of the possibility that conscious human decision making sometimes (though not invariably) plays a part in effecting outcomes, we need to separate out the three central concepts: the rules and resources potentially available in given contexts (referred to here as 'structure'); processes generating outcomes in the absence of conscious decision making (referred to here as 'event causation' or 'fate'); and conscious human activity ('agency causation').  
Giddens' notion of 'the duality of structure' implies that context and outcome can at least be seen as two sides of the same coin 'since structures appear both as condition and consequence of the production of interaction'. (See 1976, *op. cit.*, p. 157.) Yes, the consequences of one individual's activity may affect the conditions of another's, but the idea of the 'duality of structure' is confusing. It cannot be simply assumed that a particular consequence will endure and affect future action, and, if we are to separate events from agency, we need also to consider whether it was intended to do so. It is, therefore, essential to have one label for contexts and another for unintended unforeseen consequences.
- 6 Through this paper is not specifically concerned with structuralism in the sense of semiology, 'structure' also has this meaning in that context: 'where there is meaning – in a word or a sentence – there is structure, the word being restricted by the rules to a particular set of interpretations'. P. Pettit, *The concept of Structuralism: A Critical Analysis*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1977, p. 3.
- 7 B. Hindess, 'Power, interests and the outcomes of struggles', *Sociology*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (November 1982), pp. 498–9.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 499.
- 9 Giddens, 1979 and 1977, *op. cit.*
- 10 Mills, *op. cit.*
- 11 This necessarily implies that 'fate', as it is used here, does not mean 'determined' in the sense of preordained from the beginning of time. It cannot,

- because the contexts which produce unintended consequences are themselves partly a product of agency. Hence 'fate' (for present purposes, simply means 'not agency', or unintended and unforeseen. (The definition of agency is derived from Giddens, 1979: 56.)
- 12 See Mills, *op. cit.*, p. 12 and K. R. Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972, p. 124.
- 13 Mills, 1958, *op. cit.*, in his discussion of fate, appears to argue that it does. Nonetheless, when he talks of the 'drift' and 'thrust' to war he is clearly focusing on the unintended consequences of the behaviour of a power elite, rather than the actions of the multitude.
- 14 Popper, *op. cit.*, p. 342.
- 15 Giddens, 1979, *op. cit.*, p. 49.
- 16 Giddens, 1976, *op. cit.*, p. 159.
- 17 K. R. Popper, 'The logic of the social sciences' in T. W. Adorno, H. Albert, R. Dahrendorf, J. Habermas, H. Pilot and J. Popper, *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, London, Heineman, 1976, p. 162.
- 18 Popper, 1972, *op. cit.*, p. 342.
- 19 Giddens' development of the concept of tacit knowledge is extremely useful. He is, however, unclear about whether action based on tacit knowledge is the result of agency or event causation. On the one hand he appears to be arguing that it is, or may be, agency (1979, *op. cit.*, pp. 25 and 290) and, on the other hand, he appears to be saying that it is not (1977, *op. cit.*, p. 11). As I go on to argue here, it can only be seen in terms of event causation because though we use tacit knowledge to monitor behaviour, we do not hold it in a form that allows us to use it as a basis for decision making.
- Giddens does not include 'ignorance' in his discussion. In fact, for him, the unacknowledged conditions of action appear to consist of unconscious and repressed desires and wants (1977, *op. cit.*, p. 128; see also *ibid.*, p. 11 and 1979, *op. cit.*, p. 59 and pp. 218–19). But it is hard to coverage a useful distinction between 'unconscious' and tacit knowledge and understanding, while the notion of 'unconscious motives' (or 'unconscious intentions') raises all the dilemmas that are provoked by the notion of 'real interests'. (See C. W. Mills, 'Situated actions and vocabularies of motive', *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 5, No. 6 (1940), pp. 804–15, and the discussion developed below.)
- For these reasons I have adopted neither Giddens' concept of the unconscious nor his identification of it with the unacknowledged conditions of action.
- 20 Y. Lucire, 'Factors influencing conception in women seeking termination of pregnancy', *Medical Journal of Australia*, Vol. 1 (1975), pp. 824–7.
- 21 K. Bets, 'Wanted and unwanted fertility: Victoria 1971 to 1975', *The Australian Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 15, No. 5 (1980), pp. 194–208.
- 22 Pettit, *op. cit.*, p. 33.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 69.
- 24 Giddens creates the impression that it is, and also that the line between tacit and discursive knowledge is not easily crossed. Tacit knowledge, he implies, consists of that which cannot be said or thought. (See Giddens, 1979, *op. cit.*, p. 44.) I consider that it consists of that which has not been said, and consequently that the division between tacit and discursive knowledge is not fixed. The tacit may become discursive, and in as much as the discursive may be 'forgotten', when knowledge becomes deeply habituated and taken for granted, the reverse may

also occur. Processes of this kind are described by P. Berger and T. Luckman in *The Social Construction of Reality*. Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1971.

25 See D. H. Wrong, *Power: Its Forms, Bases and Uses*. New York, Harper & Row, 1979, pp. 4–5.

26 Mills, 1958, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

27 One consequence of this is that they cannot be used in any attempt to link 'power' to causal generalizations about social life. Hindess' rejection of the debate about 'structure' and agency does not allow him to consider that it is possible to construct causal generalizations about some social phenomena, those that are the result of event causation. Consequently, he rejects all attempts at generalization, and is well aware that this leaves him open to the charge of 'untheoretical empiricism' (although he denies that the charge is just). Hindess, *op. cit.*, p. 510.

28 And there are a number of extensive and useful criticisms of this in the literature. See, for example, Wrong, *op. cit.*, pp. 174–96, Hindess, *op. cit.*, pp. 506–9, and T. Benton, "'Objective' interests and the sociology of power", *Sociology*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (May 1981), pp. 165–73.

Nevertheless, these three theorists themselves have an understanding of power on some concept of intentionality. This is implicit in Hindess, who does not discuss unintended outcomes, and explicit in Benton, who defines power in terms of a capacity to realize, 'objectives' (Benton, *op. cit.*, p. 175) and Wrong (Wrong, *op. cit.*, pp. 2–5). Wrong, however, is aware of the problem and uses 'influence' as a term broader than 'power' to encompass the unintended as well as the intended. (*Ibid.*, pp. 23–4.) But, as he has specifically excluded the unintended from his definition, he does not devote much attention to it.

29 See Benton, *op. cit.*, pp. 169 and 180.

30 Questions raised by refining the definition to include tacitly known wants and desires are pursued further in notes 37 and 40 below.

31 R. Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, Oxford University Press, 1976.

32 The point is made with some force by Midgely in a critical review of Dawkins. See M. Midgely, 'Gene-juggling', *Philosophy*, Vol. 54 (1979), pp. 439–58. I am not convinced that it destroys the usefulness of the concept. For example, it appears that biologists find it difficult to define where, in any given chain of DNA, a particular gene begins and ends. (See Dawkins, *op. cit.*, pp. 22–30.) A concept that is hard to define empirically may still be theoretically useful.

Dawkins' model of change is exclusively concerned with event causation: as far as biological change is concerned this may well be reasonable, but as far as social change is concerned it is not. This notwithstanding, it can help us to understand social change in so far as this is not the product of human intentionality.

33 H. H. Gerth and C. W. Mills, *From Max Weber. Essays in Sociology*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970, pp. 62–66.

34 P. Bachrach and M. S. Baratz, *Power and Powerlessness: Theory and Practice*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1970, pp. 42–3.

35 Trivers in Dawkins, *op. cit.*, p. v.

36 We can conceive of the history of an idea or practice in three stages: externalization (its origins or creation), objectification (the achievement of some limited permanence beyond the initial activity), and dissemination (the degree to which the idea or practice comes to be widespread). These distinctions are derived from Berger and Luckman's sociology of knowledge. (They speak of three 'moments' in



a 'dialectical' process of 'objectivation' externalization, objectivation, and internalization. 1971, *op. cit.*, p. 78.) Here it is important to recognise that there is no necessary connection between the three stages, and, in particular, that there is no necessary connection between externalization and objectification. Many innovations are externalized (expressed or acted on) and perish. They do not become objectified.

The process of cultural selection, which may occur either tacitly or discursively, suggests that we may wish to reconsider the use of the word 'functional', now banished from the vocabulary of those scholars who have become sensitive to the teleological fallacy of functional explanations.

That is, if the use of the expression 'is functional for' implies an explanation of origins, and if there is no discursive connection between externalization and objectification, the implication cannot be justified. It rests on a fallacy because we cannot explain causes in terms of effects unless these effects are a result of conscious agency. At the level of event causation there is no master planner securing a given effect for a given reason.

Nevertheless, if we focus on Dawkins' memes and use 'functional' in a limited sense as a synonym for 'beneficial' or 'useful', we may argue that practices and ideas that are functional for the more powerful are more likely to be objectified and disseminated than practices that are not. This means that while the expression 'functional' should always be qualified by an answer to the question 'for whom?', and should never be read as implying an explanation of origins, it may be used to account for continuity.

- 17 That part of event causation which is an outcome of behaviour based on tacit knowledge of consequences could, as we have seen, be described in principle in terms of 'interests'. It would, however, be difficult if not impossible to operationalize because, by definition, people cannot tell us about tacitly known wants and goals. But even if this problem were overcome, that part of event causation which consists of unintended unforeseen consequences would still be unexplained, as indeed would be the origins of the ideas and practices selected at the tacit level.

Unintended consequences functional for the more powerful will be more likely to be reproduced, to survive, but a knowledge that they are so functional cannot explain why this unintended consequence and not another. Here the more powerful are selecting innovations from the range that confronts them, not creating them.

- 18 Mills addresses this problem when he argues that a search for a subject's 'real motives' may only mean that the observer does not share the subject's taken-for-granted 'vocabulary of motives'. Such a search is then an indicator of cultural distance rather than an indicator of greater objectivity. See Mills, 1940, *op. cit.*
- 19 Benton argues that 'interests' are different from 'wants', 'preferences' and 'objectives' essentially because they are 'correctible by an external observer'. See Benton, *op. cit.*, pp. 169 and 180. But this is true only in this intermediate sense. An observer can tell us that the course we are taking to achieve a goal is misguided and judgements of this kind are, in principle, subject to empirical tests. This, however, is not true of his or her judgements about the worth or desirability of our ultimate goal.

Interests, of course, just like wants and preferences, may conflict with other goals and hence generate subjective confusion. Discussion with others may help people to resolve this confusion and sort out preference hierarchies, but it

cannot tell people what their preference hierarchies should be (except with reference to further interests and objectives).

40. Benson (1981), in his commentary on Lukes's development of the concept of interests, devotes considerable attention to this point. He argues that Lukes's proposition, that we can know what the interests of the ideologically dominated really are if they can be afforded some degree of 'relative autonomy', is invalid. He goes on to address the problem himself using his own definition of power based on capacity to secure 'objectives', a term which, as note 39 above indicates, he distinguishes from interests and equates with 'wants' and 'preferences'. And he relies on Gramsci's notion of the 'symbolic content of practices' to resolve the problem of discovering the real objectives, wants and preferences of the dominated. (*Ibid.*, pp. 172-3 and 177.)

That is, in the terminology of the present paper, Benson is using behaviour based on tacit knowledge as an indicator of what some people, the dominated and manipulated, really want. The reasoning behind this is that practices based on tacit knowledge derive from the 'conditions of life in capitalist society' (*ibid.*, p. 173) and therefore are more likely to be authentic than discursive knowledge which can be perverted by indoctrination.

This is ingenious but it provides no solution. Rather, it introduces new problems of an empirical kind (we must now guess objectives by observing behaviour based on tacit knowledge, rather than by discursive enquiry), and of a metaphysical kind. For by what general principle can we know that tacit knowledge is more authentic than discursive knowledge?

41. Such a definition has already been developed in the literature and is not new. See for example, P. Saunders, *Unborn Politics*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1980, pp. 49 and 53-4, and R. A. Dahl, 'Power' in Gills, *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, Vol. 12, USA, Macmillan and Free Press, 1968. Much of the preceding discussion of interests and power was evoked by Saunders' attempt to find an 'objective' definition for interests (*op. cit.*, pp. 45-6). See also Giddens, 1979, *op. cit.*, p. 189, and, for further discussion on this and the problem of false consciousness, M. Mann, 'The Social cohesion of liberal democracy' in Mankoff, *The Poverty of Progress*, New York, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1972.
42. See R. J. Birrell, 'A new era in Australia's immigration policy', *International Migration Review*, Vol. 28 (1984), pp. 65-84. Birrell argues that family reunion had become a symbolic issue for the Southern European community leaders in Australia. In fact Southern European migrants in the late 1970s and early 1980s had few relatives overseas who wished to join them, but community leaders had developed a commitment to the idea of an active family reunion policy as a symbolic recognition of their worth and value in the Australian context. Consequently, when the immigration policy was altered to accommodate their demands the groups who actually made use of it were not Southern Europeans but the more recently arrived Asian immigrants.

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