Mann’s theory of power – a (sympathetic) critique*

ABSTRACT

Mann’s conceptualization of four sources of social power, military, economic, political, and ideological, is promising but has weaknesses. An analysis based consistently on the process rather than the phenomenology of power eliminates these weaknesses. Specifically, it suggests that much political power in society is held and exerted without any coherent purpose by the system, that is, by the state apparatus. Much ideological power is held and exerted by ordinary people, working in parallel or through their primary and secondary networks. This power puts constraints on elite actions. It may remain hidden from analyses of power in stable democracies. However, its existence and strength is revealed by the events of 1989 in Central Europe.

KEYWORDS: Social power; state; democracy; Central Europe; actor model

Most people who are too bound to the traditional political way of thinking see the weaknesses of the ‘dissident movements’ in their purely defensive character. In contrast, I see that as their greatest strength. I believe that this is precisely where these movements supercede the kind of politics from whose point of view their programme can seem so inadequate (Havel 1985: 69).

Michael Mann’s (1986, 1993) conceptualization of social power (henceforth, simply ‘power’) in societies has been influential and persuasive (see, e.g. Domhoff 1993). Mann’s scheme is a valuable step forward in clarifying comprehensively the power situation at a macro level. However, we can improve upon it. I propose such an improvement in this article by setting out what we want out of the concept of social power (i.e., considering why we are interested in power in societies in the first place), looking at what is useful and less useful in Mann’s theorizing, and finally replacing the less useful parts. My fundamental principle is that the most fruitful method for theorizing about power is to base it completely and rigorously on a conception of the power subjects – the individuals whose behaviour is affected. I use this principle to create a modified, more precise, and more – dare I say – powerful version of Mann’s scheme.
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POWER – WHY ARE WE INTERESTED IN IT?

Power is a central concept – perhaps the central concept – in political sociology (see Olsen and Marger 1993). Probably the primary reason for this, and the reason why power is generally a matter of concern to people, is that it is the key to the fact that some people realize their interests more than others do. Indeed, the latter is one of the primary ways power in society has been measured (Domhoff 1993: 173–4).

If we take that as our central motivation for the concept of power we are led to define power as the ability to affect the behaviour of others, or more precisely, the ability to affect the probability that others will perform some behaviour. This is exactly the definition favoured by some (e.g., Coleman 1990: 470; Mizruchi 1990). It differs to a lesser or greater extent with many other definitions of power, but for our purposes – getting at people disproportionately realizing their interests – it seems to be the most suitable.

It is probably worth pointing out some things this definition does not emphasize. First, some analyses of power define power as affecting others' welfare and thus only indirectly and not necessarily their behaviour (e.g., Bartlett 1989; Kelley and Thibaut 1978). While there is some logic to considering power to be affecting welfare, I concentrate on affecting behaviour, in part for two practical reasons. First, it is easier for us to ascertain effects on behaviour. Second, we thereby avoid the knotty philosophical question of what welfare is, including the conundrum of objective vs. subjective interests (see Lukes 1974; Clegg 1989).

I consider thinking, including the overt or covert expression of attitudes and beliefs, to be one type of behaviour. Thus, affecting others' thoughts would count as power. Nevertheless, although some people may be very interested merely in affecting others' thoughts, I take it that affecting others' behaviours that go beyond thoughts is ultimately much more important, at least in terms of societal or historical effects. Of course, this may be through affecting peoples' thoughts.

Mann distinguishes between distributed power and collective power. Power as I have defined it is more akin to distributed power – 'power by A over B' (1986: 6). Following Parsons (1960; see also Giddens 1979), Mann also recognizes collective power: an increase in per capita return due to cooperation. To the extent that collective power refers only to the increase in productivity, separate from the modification of individuals' behaviours itself, then it remains outside my definition. However, the realization of collective power almost always involves power as I have defined it – affecting peoples' behaviours – as a major component. Moreover, a strong argument can be made that collective power, although obviously crucial to world history, rarely exists as anything but an unintended product of distributed power or a means to the pursuit of distributed power (see Jones, 1981; Mann 1986, 1993; McNeill 1982). This would make distributed power the more central concept. In any event, I restrict my analysis and modification of Mann's scheme to power as I have defined it, thus primarily distributed power.
MANN'S CONCEPTUALIZATION OF POWER – HOW DOES HE DO IT?

Mann’s scheme focuses on a classification of four power sources: military, economic, political, and ideological. He has identified these as an effective way of understanding world history. Thus, he concentrates on these power sources as *organizational* realizations of power. His introductory chapter (pp. 1–22) in the 1993 volume makes it clear that he considers the four sources to be analytically distinct, although they may be used in conjunction and simultaneously.

Let us review how Mann conceives of these four sources of power. ‘Military powers are of organized physical force wherever they are organized’ (1986: 11). ‘Military power is the social organization of physical force’ (1993: 8). ‘Military power . . . derives from the necessity of organized physical defense and its usefulness for aggression’ (1986: 25). ‘Economic power derives from the satisfaction of subsistence needs through the social organization of the extraction, transformation, distribution, and consumption of the objects of nature’ (1986: 24; see also 1993: 7). ‘Economic organization comprises circuits of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption’ (1986: 25). ‘Political powers are those of centralized, institutionalized, territorial regulation’ (1986: 11). ‘Political power means *state* power. It is essentially authoritative, commanded and willed from a center’ (1993: 9). ‘Ideological power derives from the human need to find ultimate meaning in life, to share norms and values, and to participate in aesthetic and ritual practices. Control of an ideology that combines ultimate meanings, values, norms, aesthetics, and rituals brings general social power’ (1993: 7). You have ideological power if you ‘monopolize a claim to meaning’, ‘monopolize norms’, and monopolize ‘aesthetic/ritual practices’ (1986: 22).

The essence of Mann’s theoretical method, the basis for his classification of the four power sources, is that he conceives of the power sources as ways in which humans and other actors pursue their goals (see, e.g. Mann 1986: 28). This method has two serious, related weaknesses, which tend to be characteristic of empirical research into power at the societal level as well.

The first weakness is that using Mann’s method to look at effects at the societal, historical level, we are likely only to notice ‘big’ apparent actors – such as armies, bureaucracies, churches, and mass media – as power holders. In effect, the method leads us to classify on the basis of phenomenology rather than analytically, that is, based on process. To a certain extent Mann does base his classification on process. However, he does it inconsistently and incompletely, perhaps because he does not make this analytical basis plain. My method in this article is to improve Mann’s analysis by basing the classification of power explicitly on process.

Many classifications of power and much research into societal power share this first weakness. They are phenomenological. That is, they proceed chiefly by considering the obvious holders of power and looking at what they do. Thus the currently dominant approaches to the structure of power in modern stable democracies, the elite, resource-dependence, and state
autonomy approaches, begin with the obvious group of the potentially powerful – the elite, big corporations and their top executives, top government officials, media and their chief executives, top military brass. It then looks at what these actors do, to what extent they co-operate and conflict, and who among them seem to be more powerful (e.g., Domhoff 1983; Dye 1983; Laumann, Knoke, and Kim 1985; Mills 1956; Mintz 1975; Moore 1979; Useem 1984). These theories and researchers are not wrong. These are indeed powerful actors, and these scholars have done an impressive job of identifying the social structures present and the ways of exerting power.

The flaw here is that these approaches tend to identify the use of power and the actors with disproportionate power before developing the theory. However, what if more is going on than meets the eye? What if the researchers fail to identify all potential power holders at the beginning? Then we are left with an incomplete picture of power. This holds us back from an important goal, knowing the relative power of actors in society. We do know a lot about the power of an important group of power holders, how they use their power, and the relative power of the actors within that group. However, we do not know necessarily all the actors who most realize their interests. The above approaches make a serious error when they present their results as if we did.

As a demonstration of this first weakness, consider the recent history of Central Europe. The revolutions of 1989 do not fit with the preconceptions of the dominant approaches to the structure of power in modern stable democracies described above. Yet, before 1989 the sources of power – economy, military, media – were far more concentrated in those ‘post-totalitarian’ societies (Havel 1985) than they are in modern stable democracies. As we shall see, the lessons of the 1989 revolutions also stretch Mann’s scheme considerably. Yet others, notably Havel (1985) and Garton Ash (1989), identified the potential before those events. Indeed Havel, long a seemingly powerless, suppressed playwright, was so right that he became head of state of the Czech Republic! This is a striking counterexample to the dominant approaches to power.

The second weakness of Mann’s theoretical method is that, while power sources must include ways in which humans and other actors pursue their goals, they are more as well. Social structures and social institutions, without necessarily serving their own goals or otherwise being purposive, also affect people’s behaviours. The dominant approaches to the structure of power in modern stable democracies show the same weakness. That is, they make the mistake, strange for sociologists, of concentrating on actors as power holders to the neglect of collective productions such as social structures and social institutions. Yet, arguably and at least potentially, such collective productions can exert power too. That is, their effects on people’s behaviour are not directly reducible to the goals of power-holding actors.

This is suggested by many analyses and studies. For example, Blau (1977) analyses how demographic social structure is likely to affect behaviour in a variety of ways. Boudon (1974) shows how certain job allocation processes
can constitute a bottleneck in status attainment processes and thus affect people’s achievement of status. Moreover, these institutional mechanisms can thwart purposive attempts to affect status achievement by changing an earlier component of the status allocation process, education. Havel (1985) claims that the post-totalitarian system of communist Czechoslovakia controlled not just the common people, but those at every level of the ruling hierarchy.

Do we still want to say that such entities – social structures and institutions – have power, in spite of not being purposive? Yes. They are social. They persist and develop through the behaviour of individuals – pursuing goals, I assume (Homans 1967; Whitmeyer 1994). However, the effects of such collective productions on others’ behaviours may be above and beyond the goals of any of those individuals, or any collective actors (Boudon 1987; Coleman 1990; Havel 1985; Lindenberg 1985; Whitmeyer 1994). Mann recognizes this phenomenon to a certain extent. He conveys some of it by his notion of ‘diffused power’: ‘Diffused power is not directly commanded. . . . People are constrained to act in definite ways, but not by command of any particular person or organization’ (1993: 6). However, Mann does not acknowledge the extent to which a variety of collective productions can shape behaviours purposelessly, and that this can happen even in the most authoritarian systems.

We can avoid these weaknesses by basing our approach specifically on the process of exerting power. We do so by starting with the power subjects. We ask the question: What are the different ways in which the power subjects’ behaviour can be affected? A good model (or models) of the power subjects should make it easy to identify such ways and make it difficult to overlook any uses of power or any powerholders. A crucial point is that by basing the analysis of power on human individuals as power subjects we easily can accommodate the possibility that their behaviour is affected by – i.e., that power is possessed and exerted by – entities that are the productions of actors but are not purposive actors in their own right. Moreover, we have an ongoing source of improvement for our theory of power. Namely, improvements in models of the power subjects should lead to improvements in the analysis of power.\(^1\)

When we consider Mann’s scheme we may note that implicitly and at times explicitly (e.g., 1993: 7) he does base it on how power subjects are affected. Briefly and simply, military power is based on the fact that human individuals’ behaviour is affected by punishers, such as death, physical pain, confinement and the removal of other freedoms, and so forth. Economic power is based on the fact that behaviour is affected by rewards – the delivery of goods, services, and money.

Political power and ideological power present problems, however. Again, Mann appears to identify them from the phenomenology of power, a method that causes confusion. Obviously, Mann’s political power and ideological power both capture power processes. Yet, they do not identify the processes clearly, nor, together with economic and military power, exhaust
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all important power processes. For an example, I refer once again to the power processes that brought about the transformation of Central European states in 1989. Identifying organized power sources along Mann's lines would miss completely the winners of those events! Moreover, the power processes identified in Havel's (1985) brilliant essay, 'The Power of the Powerless', written in the darkest days of post-totalitarian rule, have to do with Mann's political power and ideological power, but not in any clear way.

A MODIFIED SCHEME FOR POWER

The Model of the Actor

I begin with a general model of the individual human actor. This model has two principal components, a set of motivators and a set of currently considered behaviours. Motivators are rewards and punishers, likes and dislikes, values, and so forth. Motivators can be altruistic and can be selfish; can consist of future states (what I mean by 'interests'); can consist of others' emotions, states, or interests; can concern self-identity; can concern material goods; can concern physical states; and so forth. At any given time, an individual performs that behaviour among her or his set of considered behaviours that best serves her or his motivators as they are valued at that time. The set is typically small, perhaps containing as few as one behaviour. One of the considered behaviours may be to try to think of additional possible behaviours. The contents of the set of considered behaviours are determined by a number of factors, among them the stimuli of the current situation.

The model, as described (see chapter 2 of Whitmeyer 1993 for a more complete description), conforms to purposive or rational actor models (e.g., Coleman 1990), or practical actor models (e.g., DiMaggio and Powell 1991), as well as models used by a variety of other theorists (e.g., Bourdieu 1977; Rosenberg 1991).

Taking the model as our starting point, we can deduce ways a person's behaviour can be affected – i.e., ways in which power can be exerted over a person. The three general possibilities are to affect the set of motivators, to affect the set of currently considered behaviours, and to affect the link between behaviours and motivators.

Military and Economic Power

Let us begin with the third: affecting the link between behaviours and motivators. The power holder can connect the performance of a certain behaviour by the power subject with the provision of rewards or punishers. If we focus simply on physical punishers, organized on a societal scale, we are dealing with what Mann calls 'military power'. Moreover, this type of power definitely is enhanced by organization (McNeill 1982; Mann 1986).
As for the provision of rewards, that is clearly Mann’s ‘economic power’. Most of the rewards that have mattered at the scale of complex societies are material goods, of which the most general and versatile is money. As numerous network studies in industrialized and industrializing societies have made clear (e.g., Galaskiewicz 1985; Laumann and Knoke 1987; Hamilton and Biggart 1988), organization matters here too.

Political Power

Those are the most direct and apparent means of affecting the link between behaviours and motivators, and not surprisingly, they are the best studied aspects of power. However, the link can also be affected indirectly, that is, without any transfer of rewards or punishments, even mediated, from the power holder to the power subject.² On a societal scale this can be done in innumerable ways. Important methods at the disposal of governments are the creation of constitutions, laws, regulations, and governmental and quasi-governmental institutions. For example, when the government grants – or breaks up – monopolies, it affects what people consume, how much they consume, what they pay, and whether or not they must queue for it. Regulation of industry, which can range from a complete laissez-faire policy to making the industry illegal, has similar effects. Other laws affect the probability of people performing certain behaviours, such as suing, by affecting the probability of the behaviours’ success.

Another way of affecting the link between behaviours and motivators is through the provision of infrastructure and services in general. For example, governments affect transportation patterns through their differential financing of and direct construction of different types of transportation infrastructure. The market system does this too, albeit often ‘diffusely’, that is, without much co-ordination by authorities. For example, stores and financial institutions provide credit cards, which facilitate purchasing and thus encourage it.

Affecting the agenda, either in a general or a literal sense, also affects the behaviour of those who follow that agenda (Bachrach and Baratz 1962; Bartlett 1989). If it is a government body being so affected – perhaps their regulation of industry is being discouraged, as in Bachrach and Baratz’s (1962; see also Lukes 1974) treatment – citizens’ behaviour may be subsequently affected as well.

Clearly, this kind of power encompasses a heterogeneous set of processes. There are two characteristics of this kind of power that make it somewhat subtle and difficult to investigate. First, these power processes may be carried out without awareness of many of the power subjects. For example, consumers may be unaware of differential governmental tariffs and quotas that nevertheless affect their consumption. Second, it is frequently useful and appropriate to consider that power exists and is being exerted when the power holder does nothing. An obvious case is when laws fail to pass. Here a government is affecting people’s behaviour in the sense that it is
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making it likely that they will continue to behave as they had been behaving.

How does this type of power relate to Mann’s scheme? For the most part we are talking about power exerted by or through the state – Mann’s ‘political power’. (There is, however, an important exception, to which I will return.) It also follows that, in many cases, the implementation of the tools of this power is crucial. This is Mann’s point about the importance of state penetration and the amount of infrastructural power (1993: 44–91; for other historical analyses see North 1981; Levi 1988). For example, if you want people to buy fewer imported cars, it is not enough to set quotas or tariffs. The quotas or tariffs must also be enforced, which requires government monitoring, effective use of the legal system, and so forth.

Mann (1993) points out the fallacy of monocratic bureaucracy. That is, the central elite, the top of the central governmental hierarchy, does not simply project its will and obtain its interests through its penetration. Others (e.g., Block 1987; Tullock 1965) have made similar points. Mann’s analysis, however, indicates that this is because the state’s infrastructural power includes the penetration of government by civil society as well. Such an analysis ignores the theoretical explanations for the weakness of bureaucracy (e.g., Tullock 1965; Coleman 1990). Essentially, bureaucracy generally fails those at the top of the bureaucracy because of an accumulated principal-agent problem: just a few levels of bureaucracy constitutes so much noise as largely to destroy the signal from the top. The relevance of this analysis is that the noise equally should destroy signals from the bottom (Tullock 1965). Thus the projection of popular will onto the government through the system, through the infrastructure, will be frustrated just as much as the reverse process.3

Thus, Mann’s analysis of political power is partially correct in noting that the central elite do not have tremendous ability to achieve their interests. However, contrary to his analysis, the power of the common people and local actors does not make up the difference. So where is the missing power?

The ‘missing power’ is in the middle, in the bureaucratic structure, in the system. It is not serving the interests of any small elite. Rather, it is the unintended and often popularly disliked emergent effect of many individuals using their own small amount of power in part to further their own interests. To elaborate Mann’s terminology, it is not authoritative but ‘semi-diffused’ – that is, diffused within the bureaucracy.

Note that this agrees well with what we know of the most extreme examples of the bureaucratist state – those of the Soviet bloc. The command economy (serving the interests of the central elite) did not do well, but neither did the ordinary people flourish (Chirot 1990; Garton Ash 1989, 1993; Havel 1985; Remnick 1993). It also agrees with Havel’s (1985) position that the system dominated the Communist Czechoslovakian state. Here, as Mann allows, the governments may be using several sources of power in tandem. However, the phenomenon described above for political power is
likely to occur as well with military and economic power. That is, government leaders will not be able to project their will effectively. Still, much of the power will belong to the system and will be exercised over ordinary people, although not purposively.

Yet an important question remains as to whether political power, here redefined as the ability to affect indirectly the relationship between behaviours and motivators, in fact may operate in a significantly more tactical and contingent fashion. Arguably, one must be in a certain place at a certain time in order to determine others' institutional, legal, or even exchange environment in such a manner as to affect their behaviour, and only certain individuals or small groups are positioned in that place at that time. Moreover, the effects of this determination are so disproportionate – or difficult to perceive – that those who control this determination have more effect than we would predict from their control over material or military resources, or even their general rank in the political hierarchy.

Certainly many accounts of government policy-making suggest that outcomes are not just the more-or-less inevitable resolution of various competing interests backed by resources of different weights, but that they are often greatly affected by contingent factors. Accounts such as Starr's (1982) history of health care in the USA and Kindleberger's (1986) discussion of monetary policy in the 1930s contain many such instances. Political power can have a disproportionate effect also when its influence endures beyond the time horizons of others interested in the outcomes. The extreme case here is political constitutions, which can be affecting the relationship between behaviours and motivators even after many generations!

The 'important exception' mentioned above is a market system. Regardless of the degree to which it is affected by the state, a market system itself exerts political power. It controls the opportunities available to buyers and sellers, thus affects their behaviour by affecting the links between behaviour and rewards and punishers. To quibble with Mann, while consumer blocs exert diffuse economic power (rewarding the provision of goods differentially), the market system as a whole exerts diffuse political power (as redefined). This point of similarity between market and bureaucratic systems will not surprise modern students of bureaucracy (see, e.g., Breton and Wintrobe 1982).

Ideological Power

Since our primary theoretical methodology is to deduce ways of affecting people's behaviour from our model of the human actor, let us see what remains after identifying the first three power sources. They stemmed from affecting the link between behaviours and motivators either directly or indirectly. We are left with affecting the set of motivators itself, and affecting the set of considered behaviours itself.

First, then, we can alter people's motivators. This can be a short-term effect, by providing stimuli that temporarily increase the weight of certain
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motivators, or by causing people to be deprived or satiated on certain motivators. It also can be a long-term effect (Lukes' (1974) third face of power; see also Bartlett 1989), for example through classical conditioning.

Second, we can influence people's sets of considered behaviours – in a variety of ways – by providing information, whether accurate or not. Thus we may exert power by suggesting certain behaviours, by giving instructions about how to do relatively simple behaviours, and by conveying information about what rewards and punishers behaviours will obtain with what probability. More indirectly, we may affect what behaviours are considered by conveying information about the environment, or about the meaning of the environment – that is, about how the environment relates to people's motivators.

Finally, we can affect people's sets of considered behaviours by altering their long-term behaviour pools, including their skills. In any given situation, what behaviours people consider will depend in part on what behaviours they can perform, how easily they can perform them, and what behaviours they are accustomed to perform. This way of exerting power thus includes Foucault's (1977) notion of discipline as power.

However, we have but one of Mann's power sources left – ideological power. Does he mean to encompass all these remaining methods in a single power source? Do we want to?

Let me begin by noting that Mann's introduction of ideological power (see 1993: 7, as quoted above) – as stemming from 'control' of things people need – conveys economic power, power due to control over valued resources (Coleman 1990), which here happen not to be material resources. In chapter two of the 1993 volume, however, he makes it clear that he does not really mean a variant of economic power, when he discusses some of the processes by which ideological power is extended. Key in these processes are literacy, and effects of church, educational institutions, media, and intellectuals. Of course, governments, and in modern times corporations, often stand behind these institutions and individuals.

Clearly church, educational institutions, media, and intellectuals provide information, and influence behaviour thereby. Most indirectly, they tell us about the world around us and tell us what it means, that is, how it relates to our motivators. For example, we find out a political change has occurred in a distant land, and we are told how that affects our national, and presumably thus personal, interests. They tell us what behaviours to perform if we want to get certain rewards and avoid certain punishers. For example, if we want to get to heaven, we must do thus and such; if we want various things out of some government, we must vote for so-and-so; we can think of ourselves as good parents, and experience exquisite taste sensations, by consuming such-and-such a breakfast cereal.

In addition, the power holders Mann associates with ideological power are involved in trying to alter motivators both over the short and long terms. Fire-and-brimstone sermons, images of gooey pizza on early evening
television, and so forth, try to heighten the relative weights of motivators we presumably already have. Over the long term, churches, educational institutions, media, and intellectuals try to create norms and values, although not necessarily the same or even compatible norms and values. Thus, they want thinking of ourselves as ‘a good mother’, ‘an Englishman’, ‘a Christian’, ‘honest’, and various other things to be positive motivators (rewards) for us. Moreover they link such motivators to behaviours: You are (can think of yourself as) a good mother if you do behaviour X. If you do behaviour Y, you are (must think of yourself as) dishonest.

Aesthetic and ritual practices also are power techniques, as Mann says. For one thing, they may be pleasurable in their own right, thus function as rewards useful in exchange, or what Mann calls ‘economic power’. However, they also transmit information implicitly: ‘This government has awesome firepower and military organization.’ ‘This church possesses magical (or esoteric) skills.’ They transmit information explicitly, such as information about behaviour leading to rewards – say, how to get to heaven. They condition identification, probably in a process similar to that induced by a winning sports team. They condition other values (Kertzer 1988).

One power technique we have deduced is left over. That is, it seems not to fit well under the label of ideological power. This is the technique of affecting long-term behaviour pools, including creating (or failing to create) skills. People, especially children, are taught – or not taught – numerous skills crucial to their future, from techniques for eking the bare subsistence minimum from the soil to social capital for prospering in the modern white-collar world (see Bourdieu 1991). On a micro level the power holders, affecting future actions of the teachable, are parents, school-teachers, and so forth. On a macro level, governments set up literacy and skill-transferral programmes in the hinterlands, create state-wide educational systems, and provide grants and subsidies to those learning certain skills or using (thus maintaining) certain skills. On the other hand, institutions and individuals can actively discourage the learning of certain skills in order to discourage those behaviours.

So Mann has left out one type of power. How much of a problem this is depends on the degree to which this power has societal, historical importance. However, a more serious problem remains with ideological power.

This problem is that as with political power, Mann has based his analysis too much on phenomenology and not enough on process, using a model of the power subjects. This leads to a signal deficiency in the identification of key societal actors with ideological power. Perhaps the clearest demonstration of this is provided by the Soviet Union and its Central European satellites in the late 1970s and 1980s, culminating in the events of 1989. The governments of the Soviet Union and its Central European satellites strongly dominated the media, rituals and aesthetics, and intellectuals. However, it was apparent that Central European governments had little
popular support withal. Without support from Soviet tanks, they fell in short order. Communist governments had tried to create new motivators; they had tried to create heroes, and identification with the communist systems; they had tried to change the meaning of various aspects of morality, such as justice; they had tried to control people’s knowledge about their environment (perhaps the aspect of ideological power in which they were most successful); they had tried to impart a particular interpretation of the environment to people. They failed (Chirot 1990; Garton Ash 1989, 1993; Havel; 1985; Remnick 1993).

Naturally, economic conditions in the Soviet bloc contributed to popular discontent. On the other hand, there is a history of popular resistance to the governments of the Central European satellites (e.g., Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968) when their economic situation relative to that in the West was not so bad. Moreover, in Central Europe the ideological failure of the communist system included even its own directors (Chirot 1990; Garton Ash 1989, 1993; Havel 1985). That is, even the material and status winners were cynical and unconvinced.

So who did have ideological power? Let us turn to our model of the actor. Who disputed the official information about the environment and its official interpretation? Who created what we might call ideological motivators — self-identity in terms of things like moral values and group identification? Who stymied the governments’ attempts to tweak those motivators to their own ends? Conventional social science suggests that the answer lies in ordinary people’s primary and secondary networks. This would include parents, not organized but presumably with parallel interests (the ultimate in diffused power). In their friendship and work networks, people inform each other and sanction each other (see Opp and Gern 1993 concerning the 1989 revolution in East Germany; see also Calhoun 1991 concerning the 1989 Chinese student demonstration). They dispute the message of the system through jokes, a ‘weapon of the weak’ (Scott 1985). Some credit may be due to the minority of dissident intellectuals. Some credit may be due to the people who ‘refused to live a lie’, by their example stimulating the moral values remaining in those around (Chirot 1990; Havel 1984; Remnick 1993).

Social science has not yet given us definitive answers to some of the most important questions. Is it parents who create the relevant motivators here, such as those of honesty and justice? Perhaps they are universal and will appear in most people automatically (see Brown 1991). But the most controlling states the world has ever known failed to change them.

One additional lesson in the 1989 revolutions concerns the power holder wielding the macro tools of ideological power — media, education, and so forth. More than individuals or groups, what the revolutions of 1989 overthrew was the system. It was the system itself, the state apparatus, that was the important ideological (and political — see above) power holder (Chirot 1990; Havel 1985). This helps to explain many events, such as why in Hungary government leaders intentionally might further the process of overthrow (see Garton Ash 1993).
CONCLUSIONS

In this article, I have critiqued Mann's (1986, 1993) conceptualization of the sources of social power. Specifically, I accepted two of his power sources, economic power and military power. I suggested modifications to his other two power sources, political power and ideological power. With regard to political power, I modified Mann's phenomenological definition to a processual one. I pointed to many of the specific ways in which political power can be exercised. Most importantly, I noted that a great deal of a society's political power is held by the system, that is, is located within the state apparatus. This power is not wielded to serve a single or coherent set of goals, but is wielded over ordinary people none the less.

I likewise undertook a processual analysis of ideological power. Once again, the appearance that so much power, here ideological power, is held by macro actors can be deceptive. Rather, an analysis based on the power subjects suggests that much ideological power is diffused among primary and secondary networks. This judgment is supported by the events in Central Europe in 1989. The processual approach also turned up a type of power that does not fit well within any of Mann's power sources as labeled: power by affecting people's long-term behaviour pools.

The chief theoretical contributions of this article are twofold. First, it expands our understanding of power processes on a societal level. Second, more generally, it illustrates the advantages of a theoretical methodology emphasizing process, here by using models of power subjects. The chief empirical contribution is to point out that power is not just held by the obvious power holders. Much power is held and exerted, purposelessly in a sense, by the system. In addition, much power is held and exerted by ordinary people operating rather privately but in parallel, or through their personal networks.

These conclusions have implications on the one hand for Central Europe, which has furnished much of the evidence for the points I have made. Namely, this analysis suggests that even if the old guard, the ex-communists, return to power in Central European countries, power will be exerted over ordinary people quite differently. This is because the system is different. The old system, which significantly affected the behaviour of all actors, is gone.

On the other hand, this analysis has implications for the assessment of relative power in 'stable democracies', especially the USA. Specifically, ordinary people, the vast network of society, and the vast numbers of ordinary people with parallel interests, perhaps parents in particular, may not appear to constitute a significant holder of ideological power. However, this disorganized mass may indeed exert ideological power by setting limits on what the more prominent actors do. To put it in different terms, most apparent variation is caused by prominent power-holding actors. They account for most of the variance, thus they appear to have most of the power. Nevertheless, the variation itself is constrained by ordinary people. All the
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advertising in the world cannot sell some products! However, the true power of ordinary people only becomes plain in abnormal circumstances, such as in Central Europe where military power allowed states to go beyond the limits to which democracies are typically held (cf. Chirot 1990). Then the concealed power of ordinary people, the 'power of the powerless', was able to show itself.

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NOTES

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1. A number of theorists make more general arguments along these lines (e.g., Boudon 1987; Coleman 1990; Homans 1967; Lindenberg 1985; Weber 1968; Whitmeyer 1994).

2. This appears to be what Lenksi (1996) calls 'influence'.

3. We may note as well that, throughout Western democracies, the proportion of GDP over which individuals have discretionary control has been diminishing steadily relative to that controlled by governments (Levi 1988; The Economist 1993: 83). This would tend to indicate that the power of ordinary people relative to that of their governments has been diminishing (see Coleman 1990: 60–3).

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