

2 The power of ideas in international relations

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Materialist, structural or ideational perspectives all have their strengths in approaching the study of regions in International Relations. In this chapter, I privilege the ideational approach, and offer a conceptual overview of the nexus between ideas and power. Following Lukes (2005b), I understand power to have three dimensions, the most salient being the ability to frame reality so as to differentiate the normal from the abnormal, the moral from the immoral and the legitimate from the illegitimate. This chapter compares Lukes' work to that of other theorists of power (Nye, Baldwin, Laclau and Mouffe, etc.). In light of the changes in domestic and international politics since 1971, it is pertinent to ask whether the Lukesian conception of power is still applicable now. And, has it been bypassed? I explore these questions in light of a possible 'fourth dimension'. Implicit here is the conclusion that Foucault's 'Power4' is *not* a distinctive fourth dimension of power, as I shall explain in due course. I focus on the 'risk' society thesis, as promoted by Giddens, Beck, Coker, and Rasmussen. In our 'second modernity', state leaders are now seen as 'risk interpreters' and 'risk managers', and not as *wielders* of power. In a global risk society, state sovereignty is precarious. A cosmopolitan morality and new forms of international organization might seem the best way forward, although Beck's analysis, one proponent of this, is beset by problems, and his work thus does not represent a fourth face. I conclude by arguing that Lukes' analysis can help us to properly contextualize the 'risk society' thesis as a form of discourse that seeks to gain hegemony as a new avenue through which power can be naturalized and exercised.

What is power? Traditional and Lukesian definitions

Power is a broad concept, and the definition of it remains a continual source of debate. Why, then, seek to understand power? We might posit three reasons. First, from a practical perspective, to help bring about the outcomes we desire, it is useful to know our own capacities and those of others. Second, in moral terms, we want to understand who is responsible for the outcomes that affect our interests and those of others. From an evaluative perspective, we may also want the ability to compare societies, to understand how much freedom some citizens

enjoy over citizens in other societies, or to understand how elites wield power in different circumstances (Lukes and Hayward 2008: 6). How we define power determines how we legitimate policies, how we rank ourselves and others and how we leverage concessions. Defining power has distinctly *political* effects. The Soviet Union promoted militaristic definitions of power, since a focus on non-military aspects served to highlight its economic and social decline. For the United States, a focus on military unipolarity and dominance made it ‘necessary’ to intervene in Afghanistan and Iraq (Guzzini 2005: 514–15). Alternatively, a focus on ‘normative’ or ‘a-military’ power promotes diplomacy and international law, privileging the ‘softer’ power of the European Union (Diez 2005).

Power as resources was a starting point for many theorists like Hans Morgenthau and Harold and Margaret Sprout during the 1940s and 1950s. Those in the neo-realist tradition, like Waltz and Mearsheimer, continue to promote a power-as-resources model, where resources translate into capabilities (Baldwin 2002: 177–8). Power is amassed and possessed, most often by states, and we can measure factors such as ‘productivity, industrial power, defensibility and self-sufficiency’ (German 1960: 138). We can also use quantitative indicators such as size of military forces, geographical area, GNP and so forth. This allows for comparison between states, the creation of hierarchies and the generation of predictions about future outcomes (Sterling-Folker and Shinko 2005: 637–40).

The power-as-resource thesis is often criticized as a ‘vehicle fallacy’, where power is equated with prestige and wealth, or military power and weapons. The larger the military or economy, the more powerful one is (Nye 2004: 28; Lukes 2005a: 478). This reasoning is problematic, since resources cannot guarantee outcomes. Having a large military did not help the US to win in Vietnam, nor did it stave off the collapse of the Soviet Union. Theorists thus make distinctions between episodic and dispositional forms of power, that is, between ‘exercising power’ and ‘having power’ (Wrong 1979: 6, 8). Failure to transform ‘potential power’ or ‘power resources’ into actual power might be attributed to a ‘malfunctioning conversion process’, where the holder of power is lacking in will or skill to forcefully implement his or her potential (Baldwin 1989: 132–3, 136). Or, it may reflect the fact that power is not particularly fungible; it cannot be broken down and used in all contingencies. It is better, as Baldwin understands it, to see power as being ‘multidimensional’, where no “ultimate” form of power, such as military power, exists. As such, ‘the distribution of power resources underlying the international power structure’ does not exist; rather, it is the case that ‘multiple distributional patterns of a wide variety of resources related to a number of significant issue-areas’ (Baldwin 1989: 145, 152–4, 167–8). This is not to argue that some states are not significantly more powerful than others in more than one domain, or even in all the domains that can be measured. But it is to understand that *being* a ‘comprehensive superpower’ does not translate into one automatically getting their own way.

Power can also be conceptualized as a relationship. For Kaplan and Lasswell (1950), Dahl (1957), and others, power is observed not by counting warheads, but by observing a relationship between two or more actors. Power can be seen

1 when the behaviour of one actor changes in response to the behaviour of another.
2 Power is thus dynamic and active, and is not a static physical attribute. Dahl's
3 classic 'intuitive' formulation is still useful: power is seen in A's ability to make
4 B do something he would not otherwise do. Alternatively, B may be prevented
5 from doing something he wants to do. Either way, B is at the losing end of a
6 power relationship (Dahl 1957: 201; Baldwin 2002: 177–8). These earlier studies
7 of power share the belief that power can be measured, because it can be
8 observed, by, for example, the number of times an actor wins in a confrontation
9 with another. Preferences are overt and consciously held. Actors' interests are
0 expressed as 'policy preferences', and one can gauge how often these prefer-
1 ences win out over those of others. For Lukes, in *Power: A Radical View* (PRV),
2 this is the first dimension, or 'face', of power, most commonly associated with
3 Dahl (Lukes 2005b: 16–19).

4 For Lukes, Dahl and his colleagues commit an 'exercise fallacy'. They seek
5 only to measure power when it is used, when actors win or lose in an observable
6 sequence of events (Morris 1987: 15; Lukes 2005a: 478). A significant draw-
7 back of this 'pluralist' model is that it assigns a rough equality to issue areas and
8 actors. Since power struggles can be found in diverse issue areas, this proves (in
9 Lukes' reading of Dahl) that power is not concentrated in the hands of an elite
0 (as C. Wright Mills would suggest), but, rather, is diffused. The first face con-
1 cludes (wrongly) that a multiplicity of issues and actors proves that real power-
2 sharing exists. The reality might be quite different. Prominent actors might battle
3 over some issues, but may equally collude to make some issues disappear
4 entirely from the public arena. Weaker actors may find their interests and opin-
5 ions are suppressed, even ignored (Lukes 2005b: 5, 38–9).

6 The second face of power, introduced by Bachrach and Baratz, concerns
7 cases where the dominant elite keeps certain issues off the public agenda, limit-
8 ing contestation to unimportant 'safe' matters that do not threaten the elite
9 actor's 'set of preferences' (Bachrach and Baratz 1962: 948). In this second face,
0 the authors critique the narrow focus of the first face, which only measures
1 public displays of the *exercise* of power. Power consists in creating 'barriers' to
2 the public airing of grievances, and social 'bias', which freeze out some altern-
3 atives, while privileging others. For Lukes, agenda setting *is* clearly a form of
4 power, although crucially, it is not the last word on what power means. Bachrach
5 and Baratz do not push far enough. They confine contestation over the public
6 agenda to 'observable conflict' even if it is 'covert'. Problematically, the lack of
7 observable conflict *ipso facto* implies that there is some 'consensus on the pre-
8 vailing allocation of values', or that the actors find the system reasonably equit-
9 able. Both the first and second faces wrongly assume that 'interests are
0 consciously articulated and observable' (Lukes 2005b: 5, 20–4).

1 Lukes highlights a third face. Unlike the first two, where power is wielded
2 consciously, we have a more insidious form, where dominant actors mould the
3 desires, interests and preferences of the dominated. Dominant values and ideas
4 become internalized. Shame or guilt results from not following what one
5 believes are the correct, moral or normal forms of behaviour. In the third

dimension, people work against their ‘real’ interests, as dominant actors impose ‘internal constraints’ that lead to self-policing. Conflict is often latent, in that people do not know what their interests and preferences are and would in any case be unable to articulate them. Third dimensional power is such that: ‘Those subject to it are led to acquire beliefs and form desires that result in their consenting or adapting to being dominated, in coercive and non-coercive settings’ (Lukes 2005b: 8–11, 13).

Power can consist of ‘domination’, that is in ‘the ability to constrain the choices of others, coercing them or securing their compliance, by impeding them from living as their own nature and judgment dictate’ (Lukes 2005b: 82, 85). Further, power:

can be deployed to block or impair its subjects’ capacity to reason well, not least by instilling and sustaining misleading or illusory ideas of what is ‘natural’ and what sort of life their distinctive ‘nature’ dictates, and in general, by stunting or blunting their capacity for rational judgment.

(Lukes 2005b: 115)

The third dimension uncovers many of the institutional constraints, norms and shared understandings that made inaction possible for the majority of a given population. ‘Indeed’, Lukes famously asks, ‘is it not the supreme exercise of power to get another or others to have the desires you want them to have – that is, to secure their compliance by controlling their thoughts and desires?’ (Lukes 2005b: 27).

Lukes’ third face is not unlike Pierre Bourdieu’s ‘habitus’, where actors are so conditioned to power that their beliefs exist ‘below the level of consciousness in a way that is resistant to articulation, critical reflection and conscious manipulation’ (Lukes 2005b: 140). More general work on discourse theory highlights a dominant or hegemonic discourse’s ability to induce consent, to naturalize a certain view of the ‘normal and reasonable’, while imposing a limited range of meanings, thereby shaping what is permissible or not (Jackson 2005: 1, 18). One might think here of the post-9/11 world. Krebs and Lobasz (2007: 411–12, 429–30) have argued that the Bush administration went to war in Iraq virtually unopposed domestically because they had ‘fixed the meaning’ of 9/11 as a war against evil. They promoted a hegemonic discourse against which it was almost impossible to argue.

However, hegemonic discourses remain contested, and no matter how powerful, following Gramsci, they are never a finished product, but rather are always ‘in process’, requiring ‘ceaseless work’ (Krebs and Lobasz 2007: 411–12). Lukes interprets Gramscian hegemony to mean the ability to limit the ‘public conception of what alternatives might be available’ (Lukes and Kearns 2006: 275). One might also see this as a ‘performative’ process, whereby the dominant discourse needs to be regularly iterated to retain its meaning (Weber 1998). Jackson (2005: 20) too notes a ‘continual process of producing, reproducing, interpreting and retransmitting the language from speaker to listener to other

speakers' and a mediation and retransmission of the discourse on a continual basis. And while we can see the successful operationalization of discourse (Bush at the domestic level for a time), we can note some failures as well. Nabers, for example, charts how the Bush administration failed to instil a hegemonic discourse internationally after 9/11. It proved unable to create a sense of common purpose and appeal to common symbols among allies. The administration failed to convince other foreign policy elites to internalize its vision of the world (Nabers 2006: 320–1).

How does one know one is being dominated, subjected to someone else's power? For Lukes, one can gauge domination by looking at an individual's 'real interests', and how they are obscured by those who promote false interests by means of suppression or manipulation. These 'real interests' are those that can be subjectively determined as those interests that promote 'well-being' or 'leading a worthwhile life'. While in theory this seems intuitively plausible, Lukes is vague and ambiguous about what real interests are, although he does offer a few examples (Lukes 2005b: 82, 85).

Probably the best-known example of Lukesian power in action is Crenson's case study of US Steel, in Gary, Indiana. Crenson demonstrates how a large manufacturing company was able to pollute its region without any public criticism. The fact that US Steel's power was uncontested reveals a lot about how the third dimension operates. Here, Gary's inhabitants had a 'real' interest in not being poisoned, yet chose not to do anything about it until 1962. This can be compared to East Chicago, where the inhabitants did complain about pollution, and regulations were introduced in 1949 (Lukes 2005b: 44–8). More generally, Lukes notes the power of large corporations, Political Action Committees (PACs), elite political actors, media barons and others, who use 'hegemonic beliefs, pervasive ideologies and media access' in order to 'induce and encourage people to have beliefs that serve the interests of the powerful while subverting their own' (Lukes and Haglund 2005: 5–6, 15). Overall, Lukes concludes, somewhat ominously, that the West is the locus of:

massive and continuous indoctrination, some of it strategically manipulative, much of it simply routine, that co-exists with freedom of conscience, communicating racist, sexist and other stereotypes and shaping agendas, national and international, especially during times of war, including the present 'war on terror'.

(Lukes 2005a: 490)

We should take from this a strong critique of the Western state system, which naturalizes forms of elite power and domination, and which thus helps to mould the preferences of marginalized people at the expense of their interests.

Lukes does not engage in any great detail with the emancipatory potential of his theories, although there is a subtext here. His interest is in power and how power is naturalized. He is less interested in helping people 'break free' of power structures. He makes reference to Martha Nussbaum's study of women's

development groups in Andhra Pradesh, but this is an aside (Lukes 2005b: 146). Rather his interest lies in cases where the contestation might be over, where the dominant have ‘won’ by moulding the preferences and interests of those that they dominate. So how can things change? To break out of existing power structures, or at least be aware of their hold on everyday life, we need to draw on the work of Laclau and Mouffe (1985) because Lukes fails to provide any theoretical road map to help us.

Laclau and Mouffe, in a useful complement to Lukes, outline how it is possible to break out of discursive spaces and to de-naturalize power relationships. They draw clear distinctions between subordination, oppression and domination. Relations of subordination can be observed in certain employment situations or family structures. Such hierarchical relationships need not be oppressive, although they can lend themselves to ‘relations of oppression’, where ‘antagonisms’ are directed towards the weaker party. ‘Relations of domination’, which tie in with Lukes’ third dimension, are best described as ‘relations of subordination which are considered as illegitimate from the perspective, or the judgment, of a social agent external to them’. Crucially, those within the system have naturalized and internalized their domination, and thus they may not see it at work, how it moulds their interests and desires. One needs, therefore, to approach domination from the outside to truly see its effects. What is needed is a ‘discursive “exterior” from which the discourse of subordination can be interpreted’. The emergence of discourses of democracy and resistance to inequality were necessary conditions to empower women and feminist movements. And the discourse of the French Revolution was needed to inspire other revolutions, by allowing an external standard by which to judge current power relations (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 153–5).

External discourses help make inequality and subordination more visible as relationships of oppression. The ‘external discourse’ thus helps impede ‘the stabilization of subordination as difference’ (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 159). Laclau and Mouffe’s conceptualization of the external discourse helps show how discursive hegemony might be unravelled. This ties in with Nabers’ reading of how actors can gain or lose discursive hegemony. His four-part model of discursive change (relying primarily on Laclau and Mouffe, and Aletta Norval) starts with a ‘crisis’, which destabilizes what a population takes to be normal. This is followed by the attempts of competing political forces to promote alternative discourses to make sense of the crisis. An ‘identity crisis’ ensues in which one form of discourse replaces another, first through negative language attacking the old discourse, then through the use of more positive language once the new discourse has entrenched itself. Finally, the new identity is stabilized and naturalized through ‘routinization’, and becomes a ‘dominant interpretive framework’ (Nabers 2008: 11–12). Such work builds a theoretical bridge between Lukes and others who devote more attention to discursive hegemony and the emancipatory potential to break past one vision of the present.

Overall, what can we conclude about Lukes’ model? First, his third face coincided with theories of discourse analysis and was a precedent for later work by postmodernists. *PRV* was written during the rise of identity politics, the tail end of

1 decolonization and the Vietnam War. As such, it tapped into a wellspring of
2 popular discontent with political and economic elites. Part of Lukes' appeal,
3 however, lies in his *reasoned* radicalism. He promotes his view as a *via media*
4 between what he sees as reformist and liberal views of power on one side, versus
5 Foucauldian 'ultra-radical' views on the other. Indeed, Lukes dismisses the notion
6 that Foucauldian power is a fourth face, which some of Foucault's followers
7 suggest in their 'extravagant claims' (Lukes 2005b: 97).

3 What precisely is the Foucauldian view? Digeser is perhaps the most notable
) proponent of a distinct Foucauldian 'Power4'. He focuses on the interrelationship
0 of power and knowledge, and seeks to understand what sort of subject is formed
1 by power, rather than understanding whose objective interests are being harmed by
2 it. The Foucauldian view presents subjects as socially constructed by power, who
3 have no interests or identity separate from knowledge and power. Subjects are
4 vehicles or instruments through which power is exercised, and thus no one has any
5 real agency or responsibility. However, *resistance* is present in all power configura-
6 tions, like dough resisting the bread pan, since we are not designed by nature to
7 be one sort of person versus another. At the same time, no one has all the power in
8 any relationship, although the postmodern, industrialized state may seek to take
9 away what little power the dominated possess (Digeser 1992).

0 While Lukes supports aspects of Foucault's work, he makes it clear that it
1 restates some 'elementary sociological commonplaces'. People are socialized to
2 adopt certain culturally determined roles and practices, which are internalized and
3 experienced as 'freely chosen'. Forms of discipline and control exist to punish
4 those who do not comply. While Foucault's style and vocabulary (his focus on
5 modes of 'governing' by social workers, parents, police, school-teachers, etc.) is
6 unique, the essence of his critique is not 'ultra-radical' but sits squarely within the
7 third dimension (Lukes 2005b: 107). How does Lukes see Foucault's work as
8 being like his own? The baseline here seems to be 'real interests'. While Foucault
9 offers a plausible account for how identities and preferences of subjects are
0 moulded by power and knowledge, this is little different from Lukes' distinction
1 between perceived interests and real interests. Within Lukes' distinction is the
2 same sort of resistance we see in Foucault, although it is more clearly stated in
3 Lukes.

4 This leads to the second point – the moral dimension of Lukes' work – which
5 marks a clear distinction from 'Power4'. For Lukes, power does not take place in a
6 moral vacuum. Rather powerful actors must be held responsible for the
7 consequences of their *actions* or their *failure* to act. Yes, causation is difficult to
8 attribute; most events have multiple causes. However, the key focus should be on
9 the most influential actor in a given situation, those 'whom we judge or can hold to
0 be responsible for significant outcomes' (Lukes 2005a: 66). Even if there is no
1 causal link, per se, by virtue of having power, an actor can be said to be
2 responsible. As such:

3
4 [y]ou can be legally responsible for outcomes, such as bankruptcy, which
5 you had no part in causing, by virtue of your official role. In political

contexts, you can be called to account to solve problems and to rectify injustices to which you made no causal contribution, by virtue of your office.

In some instances the problems may be a result of ‘structural’ factors where one may be ‘to blame’ as such, but where those in power, those with the ability to affect change, will be called on to act (Lukes and Hayward 2008: 7–8, 12).

Third, Lukes proceeds logically and incrementally. He stakes out a genealogy of how power has been defined, pointing out flaws and then proceeding to the next step. Teleologically, his view of power is framed as a theoretical end point. Lukes puts it this way:

[O]pen, visible conflict between actors (one-dimensional power) can lead to asymmetric power relations in which those who prevail control the agenda (two-dimensional power) and are eventually able to count on the compliance of others in the absence of observable conflict of interests (three-dimensional power).

(Lukes and Haglund 2005: 14)

He does not purport to cover everything, which again shows he is not promoting some sort of *grand theory*. Rather he promises only ‘a very partial and one-sided account of the topic’. This is so because it ‘focuses entirely on the *exercise* of power and, for another, it deals only with asymmetric power – the power of some *over* others – and, moreover, with only a sub-type of this, namely, the securing of compliance to domination’ (Lukes 2005b: 12, 64). Note that Lukes is not saying that the other two faces of power do not count; he is not advocating only one *super catch-all face*. Rather, he is saying that these analyses are incomplete and thus partial.

Fourth, Lukes’ methodology allows us to unpack many of the (unconscious) assumptions that underwrite other theories of power. Take, for example, Joseph Nye’s work on ‘soft power’. In *Soft Power*, Nye (2004: 27–8) breaks down power into three categories: coercion using threats, inducement using payments or co-optation using attraction. The third type of power is ‘soft’, where one achieves desired outcomes through the use of attraction, rather than through the manipulation of material incentives. It ‘rests on the ability to shape the preferences of others to want what you want’. Nye describes further:

If I can attract you to want to do what I want you to do, then I do not have to force you to do what you do *not* want to do. If a leader represents values that others want to follow, it will cost less to lead. Soft power allows the leader to save carrots and sticks.

(Nye 2004: 29–31).

Nye sees soft power as a resource, for which also having carrots and sticks seems to be a prerequisite. Can one exercise soft power without hard power looming in the background? It seems impossible to have the velvet glove without

1 the iron fist inside it. Nye is clearly not in favour of reducing American military
2 or economic power. And, while he refrains from promoting the use of coercion
3 or threats, it is clear that soft power is part of a spectrum of dominance, perhaps
4 the gentlest aspect of US power, since Nye does not rule out the need for various
5 forms of hard power. Following Lukes, we can question Nye's motivations.
6 Obviously he wants the US to continue to lead, and is so convinced of America's
7 attractiveness that he takes it for granted that this should be desirable for every-
8 one. As such, Nye fails to question whether the US should have so much influ-
9 ence, or whether it is morally right for one state to have so much hard and soft
0 power. Rather, his interest lies in how the US can be more 'strategically effect-
1 ive in wielding its soft power and "projecting" its values' (Lukes 2005a: 487).
2 Lukes' model makes it startlingly clear that what Nye openly praises is the very
3 expansion of the type of power Lukes sees as insidious. As such, what seems
4 like a good idea – namely, using more diplomacy and other means of attraction
5 – may actually be the most manipulative use of power.

The risk society

9 In what follows I will take this debate a few steps further. While agreeing with
0 Lukes that Foucault's Power4 does not constitute a fourth face, I interrogate
1 whether another sort of fourth face is possible, one where states and state actors
2 are held captive by events that they no longer control. Is it possible for an actor
3 to feel so much responsibility that they lose the power to mould desires? Can
4 actors be so caught up in complex, interdependent relationships, that cause and
5 effect, dominator and dominated, lose much of their relevance? In 'risk society'
6 theories, decision-makers exist in an environment where power is so bound up in
7 a sense of responsibility that elites have little agency. The risk society concept
8 was introduced by Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens in the 1980s, with further
9 refinements by Mikkel Rasmussen and Christopher Coker. Beck proposes a view
0 of power that is deformed and severely constrained by the 'second modernity'.
1 Power still exists, but not in a traditional strategic sense. It can be seen most
2 cogently in terms of who has the power to define risks, prioritize them and then
3 act to reduce their harm to the actor. This includes the ability to transfer risk
4 (only temporarily) to other societies so as to avoid immediate harm to the power-
5 ful. Further, the risk society carries with it the potential to create new communit-
6 ies bound by shared conceptions of risk.

7 Beck does not define risk, although we might define it as a state of affairs
8 involving two components, exposure and uncertainty: we are exposed to a situ-
9 ation where we are not certain of the outcome (Holton 2004: 22). We can also
0 break risk down into three components: threat, vulnerability and consequences.
1 The first refers to the probability than an event will occur, the second assesses
2 the likelihood that some sort of damage will occur, while the third refers to the
3 type and magnitude of the damage that may result (Willis *et al.* 2005: xvi). Beck
4 does, however, tell us which risks are important: environmental risks like global
5 warming, nuclear proliferation and other dangers associated with nuclear waste,

the spread of WMDs, food risks including genetically modified organisms, as well as global terrorism. These and other problems ‘call into question in a quite tangible way the very foundations of social life’ (Beck 2007: xii). Leadership is not about winning, but risk management. Power is a tool through which we can reduce risks down to a level deemed acceptable by a policy-making elite. Yet, power is about responsibility, not about having one’s way. Those who have power have the responsibility to act, or they will be judged for their neglect.

Central to risk society theory is the break between the ‘first’ and ‘second’ modernities. This might be seen as a grey zone or thick boundary that we passed through, perhaps without even being aware of it. The differences between these two modernities are crucial because the nature of risk changes substantially. While in the past (the first, more happy modernity) we knew risks were the necessary price to pay for profit, and there was a link between ‘wealth production’ and ‘risk production’. That balance has now changed (Beck 1992: 11). In the first modernity we calculate risks, and make conscious trade-offs. We choose a risk to achieve an expected gain. This ‘risk contract’ fails in the second modernity, where losses are not the outcomes of gains, and there is no rational trade-off (Beck 2009: 7). Modernity is now ‘reflexive’, both in the sense that we can reflect on our era with better knowledge than our contemporaries in the past, as well as in the sense that modernity has a kickback or boomerang effect – it reflects what we do (Beck 1992: 11, 37–8, 44).

Embedded in the risk society literature is the ‘precautionary principle’, which comes out of the 1970s environmental movements. Here, any form of industrialization, no matter how beneficial it is, always implies costs to the environment (Coker 2009: 99). The risks generated by the second modernity – epitomized by CFCs, DDT, thalidomide or Three Mile Island and Chernobyl – set the stage for later fears, especially as the Cold War wound down. Rasmussen establishes clear connections between the precautionary principle promoted by environmental movements and the Bush doctrine of pre-emption, both of which adopt ‘risk society strategy’ as normal policy (Rasmussen 2006: 6, 93). What begins as a marginal, if scientifically sound, theory is co-opted by mainstream hard power politicians within two decades to target terrorism and other threats to state power, and not to the environment.

Where does power lie? In three interrelated dimensions: first in the ability to define risks, second in the ability to respond appropriately within that definition and, third, in the ability to take measures that transfer risk from one’s own population to another. First, in line with constructivist scholarship, there is a certain manufactured, constructed aspect to risk. Beck’s main theoretical move in *World at Risk* (2009) is his conceptualization of ‘staging’. This does not imply the exaggeration of ‘unreal’ risks, or the deliberate falsification of reality. Rather, decision-makers engage in a performative process of highlighting certain risks over others. The way events are given meaning accounts for their impact, not the events per se. Beck puts it thus: ‘it is not the terrorist act, but the global staging of the act and the political anticipations, actions and reactions in response to the staging which are destroying the Western institutions of freedom and democracy’ (Beck 2009: 10–11).

Second, contestation over risk leads to ‘conflict over domination’. Only some countries have the power to follow through on their risk assessments, to force other countries to accept their definition, with all of its attendant costs and consequences. This type of domination involves the use of multiple actors and multiple skills, including diplomacy, military power and leadership (Beck 2009: 150). Beck is, then, essentially echoing Lukes’ third face. One needs not only to be able to coerce by force, but must also be able to convince.

Third, the thesis highlights emerging power configurations in world politics between ‘risk donor’ countries and ‘risk recipient countries’. Global inequalities increase as risks increase, as those with resources will be better able to hold off the consequences of the risks. While they will eventually suffer too, there will be a period where a larger division of global ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’ will emerge as the risk society becomes more globalized (Beck 2009: 30, 37). While everyone will face risks, a new division is set to split humanity, replacing the class divide. The new division will be ‘between those who have the power to define their self-produced risks and those who are exposed to, or at the mercy of, risks over which others decide.’ Beck thus presents us with new global divisions that replace class divisions in their promotion of inequality. In this forum, ‘risk is another word for power and domination’ (Beck 2009: 142). While the world risk society threatens us all, certain actors have more power to act. They have the power to transfer risks to other parts of the world, even by fighting ‘risk wars’ in other countries like Iraq, to transfer, perhaps, the risks from central New York (Beck 2009: 149–50).

Ultimately, however, attempts to define and act against risk, as well as attempts to transfer risk, are futile, since no one can predict outcomes, something central to the first two faces of power. The risk society implies a loss of power for the national policy-maker, who must strike a balance between the management of current risks and the avoidance of a boomerang effect. ‘Since both the risks he wants to pre-empt and the risks that might arise from pre-emptive action are based on scenarios, neither of them are real in any way that can be measured or assessed with any finality’ (Rasmussen 2006: 135). The traditional power of the state is severely eroded. Since risks are built into the very fabric of modernization, they can affect anyone and everyone in every country of the world – rich and poor, strong and weak. We are all part of a ‘global community of threats’ and threats are not nationally based but transnational, something individual countries are powerless to solve alone (Beck 2009: 8–9).

As Coker puts it, what power states have is illusory, since modern society has led to

the concept of a ‘long’ or ‘never-ending war’, an *a-strategic*, tactically driven risk management policy which locks the West into an endless process of risk management. A risk society is necessarily a safety society, one that is permanently on the defensive.

(Coker 2009: 26)

This is where we might posit a fourth dimension, one where the powerful are so constrained by the costs of their potential decisions, and so overwhelmed by risks outside their borders and beyond their expertise, that they are effectively paralyzed. In other words, the risk society imposes important material and ideational *disincentives* for actors to use the power at their disposal. The risk society thesis thus entails a high degree of self-policing.

Beck's cosmopolitan agenda

What can we make of all this? Arguably, the risk society thesis is a twin discourse of national powerlessness and global collective action. It is a discourse seeking to gain hegemony, which Laclau and Mouffe's work allows us to see clearly. Beck's objectives may be positive, even noble, but he has an agenda: to denaturalize Westphalian state sovereignty, while promoting a 'cosmopolitan *realpolitik*'. The future lies in breaking out of national containers, thinking big. States need to 'despacialize', to form 'new cooperative transnational executive bodies' where governments act in 'transnational space'. Forms of 'cooperative sovereignty' must develop to deal with global problems: transnational corporations, terrorism and other challenges (Beck 2007: 86–7). Beck pushes for a cosmopolitan imagined community, generated by everyone coming together against shared global risks 'that threaten everyone's existence'. Global risk, as such,

opens up a moral and political space that can give rise to a civil culture of responsibility that transcends borders and conflicts. The traumatic experience that everyone is vulnerable and the resulting responsibility for others, also for the sake of one's own survival, are the two sides of the belief in world risk.

(Beck 2009: 56–7)

There is nothing *intrinsically* wrong with Beck's agenda. Cooperation between states is generally productive, while most global problems cannot be solved by individual states acting alone. However, Beck instrumentalizes a discourse of fear to make his new future *necessary*, due to the inevitable destruction that will result if we do not bring it about. Beck wants to scare people into being cosmopolitans. It may work in the long term, but, as it stands, the process has several flaws.

First, the division of recent history into separate worlds before and after the Cold War is itself a 'staged' process, to use Beck's term. The Cold War is presented as a period when 'threats' could be calculated, based on various Dahlian observables like warheads or tanks. A threat, reflecting the first face of power, is 'a specific danger which can be precisely identified and measured on the basis of the capabilities an enemy has to realize a hostile intent.' Threats are 'measurable and finite'. By contrast, a risk (such as terrorism or the spread of WMDs) cannot be so easily calculated and is therefore more dangerous, more uncertain, more like a 'flow' (Rasmussen 2006: 1–2, 4).

1 The problem is, however, that life was not predictable during the Cold War.
2 Coker is indeed correct that the closest we came to global Armageddon was
3 during the Cuban Missile Crisis (Coker 2009: 74). The difference now is that
4 risk is 'debounded' – that is, not tied to a particular country. Yet are debounded
5 risks really less dangerous than a determined Cuban dictator, allied with
6 Moscow, seeking to launch nuclear missiles? The very 'predictable' and
7 'calculable' factors that Rasmussen discusses *produce* risks. Nuclear weapons
8 are easy to count, but they still cause the real risk of accidents. Take the problem
9 of 'broken arrows' – situations where mistakes and ineptitude led to potentially
10 fatal errors and nuclear war. The *New England Journal of Medicine* reported in
1 1998 'at least five instances of U.S. missiles that are capable of carrying nuclear
2 devices flying over or crashing in or near the territories of other nations'. From
3 1975 to 1990, approximately 66,000 military personnel involved in operational
4 aspects of the US' nuclear forces were discharged due to a combination of
5 alcohol or drug abuse, or psychiatric problems (Forrow *et al.* 1998).

6 Another example: nuclear war games were conducted that always resulted in
7 several *million* hypothetical European deaths in any stand-off with the Soviets.
8 Former Defense Secretary McNamara recalls the 1955 nuclear exercise 'Carte
9 Blanche', which simulated the use of 335 nuclear weapons, the majority of them
10 over German territory. The immediate death toll was estimated at being between
1 1.5 to 1.7 million with a further 3.5 million wounded. Additional studies in the
2 1960s and 1970s confirmed that, in the event of a nuclear confrontation, some-
3 where between 2 and 20 million Europeans could be killed, perhaps far more if
4 war escalated to the cities (McNamara 1986: 33–4).

5 But, to go back even further, can we say that SARS or swine flu are worse for
6 us today in the second modernity than the bubonic plague, smallpox or the 1918
7 flu epidemic were for people before and during the first modernity? Many past
8 dangers seemed global, in that borders did not stave off disease, while both rich
9 and poor suffered. The spread of exploration and colonialism from the fifteenth
10 century led to the unforeseen deaths by disease of tens of millions of indigenous
1 peoples. In European cities of the fourteenth century, it was not unknown for
2 10–20 per cent of a population to die 'at a single stroke' from diseases such as
3 plague, smallpox, typhus and typhoid fever (Stannard 1992: 57). Henry Dobyns
4 has chronicled no less than forty-one smallpox epidemics and pandemics from
5 1520 to 1899, seventeen measles epidemics and ten major influenza epidemics
6 and pandemics in roughly the same time-frame, not to mention four plague
7 epidemics, five diphtheria epidemics, four typhus epidemics, four scarlet fever
8 epidemics and six other epidemics from the sixteenth to the early nineteenth
9 centuries (Stiffarm and Lane 1992: 31).

10 A further point to remember is that that when we do encounter disasters like
1 the tsunami of 2004, we have better emergency management skills to respond, as
2 well as to rebuild afterwards. Even if we take Beck's point, which is speculative,
3 that risks are infinitely more dangerous now, our capacity to cope has improved
4 (Jarvis 2009: 58–9). Jarvis is right to observe that Beck downplays the obvious
5 success of recent risk management efforts, 'and tends to adopt, instead, a kind of

fatalistic view of the human condition; an inability to correct errors, an ineptitude when it comes to moderating risk producing behavior, and a collective inertia in the face of looming risk(s)' (Jarvis 2009: 61).

Another point to consider is whether global risks really do imperil the legitimacy of the nation-state and national governments. Beck assumes that they do, and Coker adds that the Bismarckian social contract, with its emphasis on security and welfare, breaks down when states cannot save their people from a terrorist or other attack (Coker 2009: 77, 82–3). While this sounds plausible, neither Coker nor Beck produce any evidence that this is the case. Rather, in the US, the public rallied to President Bush, and his approval ratings hit 90 per cent for four months following the attacks. While Americans ultimately rejected Bush's surveillance state model, and the war in Iraq, they elected Obama and preserved their belief in the US' institutions to deliver 'change' when it was required. Despite Beck's pronouncements, the state is not an empty container. It continues to wield considerable power; tax revenues have not declined and welfare state provisions have increased markedly since 1960. Many states thus seem to be using globalization as a process to achieve their own ends, rather than being manipulated by it. They retain strong institutional capacity and are far more adaptable than Beck suggests (Jarvis 2009: 30, 36, 39–40). We need to understand the risk society thesis as another form of discourse. It is a frame looking to achieve hegemony over how we conduct world politics. Its goal is to create a new cosmopolitan space for solving the world's problems.

Conclusion

Lukes' short and influential work remains useful for a variety of purposes. It signals how Beck and other risk society theorists seem to be pushing us to adopt new desires and interests, based on a different perception of what normal means. Coupled with Laclau and Mouffe, Lukes' work allows us to step outside of this risk discourse, to see Beck's attempt to create a new discursive hegemony. When applied to other recent work, such as Nye's identification of 'soft' and 'smart' power, we can also see how what is presented as positive and progressive might actually be more insidious and manipulative than overtly Dahlian forms of power. While power remains contested (it is hard to imagine how it cannot be), there is little in the vast Foucauldian literature, or the more recent work on risk society, that suggests there really is a distinctive fourth face that supersedes Lukes' work.

Lukes' work remains salient because it is centred on power relationships: on relations of domination and acquiescence. Further, it has the merits of focusing attention on intentionality and responsibility as key variables in the assessment of power and agency. It also allows us to understand that even if a powerful actor is not aware of their domination over others, this does not prevent us from assigning responsibility to that actor. As such, Lukes promotes what represents a crucial moral turn in the study of power, which, almost four decades after he conceived it, still remains valid in the study of domestic and international politics.

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