

# The Signature of Power

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SOVEREIGNTY, GOVERNMENTALITY  
AND BIOPOLITICS

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## INTRODUCING THE SIGNATURE OF POWER

**1.1** The concept of power has long been central not only to the social and political sciences but also in everyday language and discussion. We often assume that we know what we mean when we use the term and that it helps us describe the world in which we live. Yet, today there are some influential thinkers who will claim that ‘power’ cannot explain anything and that therefore it is a relatively useless concept. In doing so, they reject a longstanding reason for the study of power: to offer a critique of society, its institutions and practices and even its ways of reasoning and forms of knowledge. Explicitly or implicitly, such critique implies that there are alternative ways of doing things. Perhaps this involves overcoming or overturning power, or more simply, particularly in the case of the complex history of liberalism, making sure its exercise is legitimate. This means asking certain types of question. How can power be made accountable and transparent? How can power be made safe from its inherent dangers? How can we guard against the corruption inherent in it, for as Lord Acton wrote in 1887, and every schoolchild now learns: ‘[p]ower tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely’ (Dalberg-Acton, 1907: 504). These kinds of question about the appropriate, safe and legitimate use of power are normative ones. They concern the ‘ought’ of power, rather than power as an actuality or operation.

Our starting point is more analytical than normative. An analytics of power is less interested in the normative questions of how power should be exercised than the establishment of perspectives and concepts that help us understand how power relations operate. This distinction, of course, is far from clear-cut and every description of power implies an ethos or orientation. Looked at in a certain way, every analytical, descriptive or diagnostic statement about power contains within it a normative evaluation of the phenomenon under discussion. If we say, for example, that in contemporary liberal-democracies,

‘sovereign forms of power have been replaced by complex networks of governance’, or that ‘a biopolitics of the population has been replaced by a more grassroots vital politics’, we appear to be offering an analysis. Yet each of these contains a normative element that could endorse current social and political arrangements over past ones. However, that does not mean that we should refrain from attempting to develop an analytically oriented set of concepts.

This book seeks to combine that rigorous approach to concept and method with an ethos that might appear contrary to it. It wants to maintain a sense of the essential mystery of power as a set of concepts and practices, that power is not as obvious as we think it or as *passé* as some contemporary thinkers maintain. It asks the reader to journey into some obscure and arcane topics and stories in the service of understanding this term.

But first, what is power? In many languages there is more than one term for what is meant by the English word ‘power’. Thus in German *Kraft* and *Macht*, and in French, *puissance* and *pouvoir*, broadly contrast the force of something with the capacity to do something. In this sense they allow us to distinguish between the power of the President’s speech, that is, of its rhetoric, logic, and arguments, and his power as Commander-in-Chief of the United States’ military. Despite this situation, each of these languages has a key equivalent in the scientific discussion of power: *Macht* in German, *pouvoir* in French and *potere* in Italian. In the romance languages, these same words serve as a noun for power and a verb for ‘can’, thus underlying the closeness of the relationship between power and capacity, ability or potentiality. Centrally, in these three languages, *Macht*, *pouvoir* and *potere*, are the terms one uses to express the case when someone has power over someone else.

This is a commonplace observation but it allows us to make a point that is far from trivial: the concept of power is located in a dense field of distinctions and relations with many other terms. In English, there is authority, domination, legitimacy, jurisdiction, violence, government, coercion, control, capability, capacity, ability, force, and so on. In this respect, we can agree with a point made by Mark Haugaard (2010) that it is not enough to recognize, as we have since at least Steven Lukes (1974), that power is ‘an essentially contested concept’ (Gallie, 1956). We must also accept that there is no essence to the concept of power beyond its contested uses. Haugaard instead, following Wittgenstein, permits only a set of ‘family resemblances’ between uses and concepts of the term.

This view provides us with two starting points. The first is the simple one that the study of power should be broad in its themes, its topics and its perspectives, and be prepared to accept that the exploration of the concept of power might lead us to the most unexpected of places. This book takes up that challenge in its approach and its structure. The second is that to propose that there is no essence of power is not to say that there is no discernable structure or architecture to these ‘family relations’ that obtain between concepts of power. So we start from the presupposition that it is possible to chart, to map, or to make a diagram of, the ways in which various senses, concepts, ideas and even theories of power exist in relation to one another. This, as the reader will discover, is captured by the idea of ‘signature’ in this book’s title.

The initial horizon for the present investigation of concepts of power was to contribute to an understanding of its conceptualization and ultimately to both its ‘genealogy’ (the study of the conditions of emergence of organized practices and ways of thinking), and its ‘analytics’ (the key questions that might be asked of how power operates in any given situation). By the end of this book, this starting point will lead us not only to endorse the genealogy of the arts of government and an analytics of power, as Michel Foucault called them, but to a number of other projects: a political archaeology of glory, a historical sociology of sovereignty and an analytics of sovereign practices, a political morphology of the event and an analytics of publicity. These projects are a part of a research program about power that emerges when one considers not only the work of Foucault, which we will do, but that of two other thinkers, both controversial to different degrees – Carl Schmitt and Giorgio Agamben. In addition, many other thinkers are considered here, often with lines of descent from Max Weber, and the book will address themes and areas not usually found in books on the concept of power. These include Christian theological arguments about the Trinitarian ‘economy’, order and providence and the study of religious and political rituals and symbols. They also include organizing terms and debates, such as secularization, rationalization, and legitimation, that address the novelty or otherwise of the present, including its forms of power, in relation to the past. Importantly the book focuses on three concepts that have occupied much of the recent discussion about different forms, types, zones, or clusters of relations of power: sovereignty, government (or governmentality),

and biopolitics. Rather than seek to define them at the outset, or how we might approach them, we shall let them emerge from the work under discussion.

The investigation proper begins with the next chapter. The main point of this introductory chapter is to provide and illustrate the key that will help us explore this mysterious terrain and that will allow us to begin to examine the structure of these ‘family resemblances’. We will call this the signature of power, notwithstanding that the use of the term ‘signature’ here is far more limited than that of its most renowned recent exponent, Agamben. This introductory chapter is a preparation for a journey, not the journey itself. It situates the journey in the much wider geography and identifies the ‘signature’ as a kind of passport that allows us to move freely from one territory to another. Just as getting one’s passport is not as exciting as the places it allows you to visit, but is essential if you wish to do so, the demonstration and definition of the signature of power is nowhere near as interesting as the exploration it allows.

## Concepts of power

**1.2** For the lay person, it is hardly necessary to pause and consider the notion of power. Power is quite self-evidently the preserve of the powerful, is exercised over those with less power or the powerless, and ensures that those who hold it get their way in most situations and typically gain substantial material or other rewards. This definition of course is tautological and would please neither logicians nor social and political scientists. Yet when the most famous of sociologists, Max Weber, formulated a definition of power in the early years of the twentieth century he did so with something similar to this view of power in mind:

‘Power’ is the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which that probability rests. (1968: 53)

Since then this definition of the form of power has been repeated and refined many times, most eminently by Robert Dahl and Steven Lukes. Dahl, writing in McCarthyite America, translated something

like this into the alphabetical terms that would kick off ‘the community power debate’ with what he saw as a ‘bedrock idea of power’:

A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something B would not otherwise do. (1957: 202–3)

Continuing in the same vein, Steven Lukes, in a discussion which both completed that debate and inaugurated much of the recent discussion of power, stated:

The absolutely basic common core to, or primitive notion lying behind, all talk of power is the notion that A in some way affects B ... in a non-trivial or significant manner. (1974: 24)

In recent years, these definitions of power are less the building blocks of a theory of power than the point from which that theory departs. While all three suggest a situation of two or more actors in which one realizes its aims or will at the expense of others, we see a shift from Weber’s notion of power as probability, and hence as a capacity or even potentiality, to Dahl’s concept of power as something possessed, although his own formulae are expressed as probabilities. This idea of power as possessed has been called into question, most famously by Foucault (1979: 94), and all three quotes could be read as implying a ‘zero-sum’ conception of power in which the exercise of power by one actor subtracts from the power, or even the freedom, of other actors.

In so far as all three imply an asymmetrical relationship between more than one actor, they could be viewed as instances of power as ‘power over’, itself occasionally identified with domination. However, Weber’s definition of power also contains the fundamental notion of the capacity of an actor to carry out his own will. In this sense, Weber’s definition encompasses an even more basic sense of the word power as capacity. This idea of power as ‘power to’, or the capacity of actors to achieve their purposes, can be found in the canonical figure of the English state-theorist of the seventeenth century, Thomas Hobbes: ‘The Power of a Man is his present means to obtain some future apparent Good’ (1996: 62). We have already, then, departed from the everyday view of power with which we started. Power is not simply the power of one actor (individual, institution, etc.) over another or others, but, even more fundamentally, the capacity to achieve some desired end. We can thus distinguish between power into ‘power over’ and ‘power to’.

Barry Hindess (1996) has argued that ‘power to’ and ‘power over’ are each variants of a notion of power as a kind of quantitative capacity to realize an actor’s will, and so part of a single conception of power. This conception, he insists, can be contrasted with the other major conception or discourse of power in the West, power as right, or legitimate power. This conception of power usually appears in relation to what Hindess calls sovereign power, ‘the power that is thought to be exercised by the rule of the state or by its (central) government’ (1996: 12). This kind of power for Hindess is most clearly exemplified in the work of a later English political theorist, John Locke, with his notion of political power both as the right to make laws and the capacity to enforce them (Hindess, 1996: 52). Power as right is hence a concern with the legitimacy of political power, which Locke and the framers of the American Declaration of Independence viewed as residing in the decision of the people themselves (p. 53). In Locke’s case, the crucial question, ‘Who decides?’, is answered with the ‘people’. However, as John Dunn and Quentin Skinner have both pointed out, Locke provided an account of the origins of legitimate government, not every occasion of the exercise of political power by it (Dunn, 1969: 141–7; Skinner, 1998: 27, n. 84).

With Max Weber, this question of power as right, or what he calls legitimate domination is less a feature which may or may not reside in the relationship of people to their government, and more the sociologically specifiable conditions which secure the compliance of subjects to most, if not all, the commands of the ruler. Unlike Locke, legitimacy is secured on different grounds, including legal, charismatic and traditional ones (Weber, 1968: 215). However, in modern types of administration, legitimacy for Weber bears a striking similarity to Locke’s notion of political power as the right to make and enforce laws in that it is based on rational grounds ‘resting on a belief in the legality of enacted rule and the rules of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands’. In many twentieth-century variants of liberalism and in notions of ‘good governance’, the domination of the state is held to be legitimate to the extent to which it corresponds to the ‘rule of law’.

Another antinomy thus displaces that between ‘power to’ and ‘power over’. This is power as capacity (including power to and power over) and power as right or legitimate power (itself including the effective capacity of law enforcement). Even those who start from ‘power over’ find themselves drawn to the problem of legitimacy of

power. Thus Lukes famously asks, in relation to what he calls the 'third dimension of power':

Is not the supreme and most insidious example of power to prevent people, to whatever degree, from having grievances by shaping their perceptions, cognitions and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things, either because they can see or imagine no alternative to it, or because they see it as natural and unchangeable, or because they see it as divinely ordained and beneficial? (1974: 24)

Lukes's third dimension of power clearly rests upon the idea of power as right. The idea that power so shapes people's consciousness that they are not in a position to know, let alone air, their grievances, implies a 'radical' view of power. Lukes thus presupposes an ideal of a community of morally autonomous individuals who would be capable of giving consent to the exercise of political and social power, had they not been prevented by its 'supreme and insidious' exercise. Lukes therefore holds not only a conception of power as 'power over' but as legitimate or illegitimate as the case may be. While power as the capacity to realize one's will is usually thought to imply an analytical or empirical approach concerned to describe how power is exercised, power as right implies an ideal of how power ought to be exercised, and is thus at the basis of many normative conceptions of power.

The idea of a community of morally autonomous subjects who freely consent to the binding commands of sovereign political authority runs through much moral and political philosophy with Locke as a key exemplar. It is found in twentieth-century critical theory, such as that of Herbert Marcuse's critique of one-dimensional man and Jürgen Habermas's specification of the conditions for an ideal speech situation, and in the Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci's view of hegemony. In the latter, the rule of the bourgeoisie in advanced capitalist societies is based on both coercion and consent, but consent is given by those who do not know it is in their interests to overthrow the system of capitalist production. This is of course very similar to Lukes's view. Alongside the distinction between power over and power to, and between power as capacity and power as right, we have empirical (or analytical) and normative conceptions of power. The defining characteristic of critical theory, and most of what is called political theory,



may be that, however it is analysed, power is approached from such a normative point of view.

We are beginning to get a sense of where the signature of power might lie but we shall first explore two or three more instances of this phenomenon.

**1.3** Another distinction is often drawn between conflictual and consensual views of power. The former emphasizes the sense in which power is exercised at the expense of or in relation to another party and focuses on power over or domination. The latter, by contrast, emphasizes what might be called ‘power with’, a kind of collective version of power to. In the case of the ancient distinction between *potentia* and *potestas*, as taken up by Spinoza, the former represents an original constitutive force. The formation of the state is no longer a foregoing of certain aspects of humans’ power in the constitution of the sovereign but remains grounded in the collective power of the multitude (Saar, 2010). Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000) have recently invoked the multitude as a kind of constitutive power that is created by and acts as a counterforce to the forms of power characteristic of the global Empire. While there are a large number of twentieth-century thinkers, including Talcott Parsons, who adopt a consensual view of power, it is Hannah Arendt who most clearly states that:

Power is always, as we would say, a power potential and not an unchangeable, measurable and reliable entity like force or strength. While strength is the natural quality of an individual seen in isolation, power springs up between men when they act together and vanishes the moment they disperse. (1998: 200)

Unlike recent social scientists who have stressed the dependence of the exercise of power on assemblages made up of technical, material and inhuman elements (Latour, 2005), Arendt strikingly argued that ‘the only indispensable material factor in the generation of power is the living together of people’ (1998: 201). In this sense, power then concerns plurality. It can be divided without its decrease, *contra* the zero-sum notion of power as domination, and the checks and balances upon power do not repress but facilitate it and generate more power.

Arendt’s notion of power opposes power not only to domination, but also to strength, force and to violence. Rather than existing

on a continuum of forms of power, it is violence that destroys it, undermining the sense of humans acting in concert. Rule that relies on violence is known as tyranny: 'the time-honored fear of this government is not exclusively inspired by its cruelty...but by the impotence and futility to which it condemns the rulers as well as the ruled' (1998: 202). For Arendt then, we could also oppose a productive conception of power to one of repression. A similar sentiment is found in Foucault for whom neither consent nor violence 'constitute the basic principle or basic nature of power' and whose definition of power as a 'way of acting upon one or more subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action' implies something akin to this notion of potential or capacity of all human individuals and collectives (2001: 341).

The attempt to define and characterize power leads us down the path of a multiplying and cross-cutting set of distinctions. The distinctions between productive and repressive, consensus and conflict, 'power with' and domination, power and violence, can be read as versions of 'power to' and 'power over', although they also clearly bring into play conceptions of power as right and normative views of power. A further distinction can be made between what might be called episodic conceptions of power implied in the alphabetical scenarios of the initial definitions and 'economic' conceptions of power.

Foucault's most famous and widely cited work, *Discipline and Punish* (1977) uses the term 'economy of power' surprisingly often. He writes of an 'internal economy of a penalty' (p. 18), imagines situating systems of punishment in a 'certain "political economy" of the body' (p. 25), views the true objective of the eighteenth-century penal reform movement 'as to set up a new "economy" of the power to punish' (p. 82), adopts the 'standpoint of the economy of the power to punish' (p. 99), analyses a 'whole learned economy of publicity' (pp. 109–12), describes the relationship of the new disciplines to the body as one of 'the economy, the efficiency of movements, their internal organization' (p. 137), and shows how the examination 'transformed the economy of visibility into the exercise of power' (p. 187). It is, we might venture, not simply a matter of a metaphor, whether in quotation marks or not, but an indication of an approach to the analysis of power that has become, since his initial contribution, increasingly influential.

One theorist of organizational power, Stewart Clegg (1989), amplified our vocabulary of power when he added two other 'circuits of power' to the episodic exercise of power captured in our initial

definitions. They were ‘dispositional power’, which for him sets up the rules of the game and ‘facilitative power’ that, like Foucault’s notion of ‘positive power’, establishes the game itself, and forms the actors and agents that enter into episodic interactions. Clegg himself also speaks of an ‘economy of power’ to capture this sense that practices, such as disciplinary techniques, and forces, coalesce to create the conditions under which actors are shaped and power in its episodic sense might be exercised (p. 18).

This notion of an ‘economy of power’ is extremely intriguing and has come to occupy a central place in recent discussions of and indeed suspicions of power. Here, economy suggests an ordering, or form of management, of power relations and thus recalls the earliest etymology of economy (or *oikonomia*) as the management of the household (*oikos*) in Ancient Greece. This idea of power as a kind of self-managing order was proposed, without the word economy, in one of the first attempts by Foucault to understand power.

It seems to me that power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization ... (1979: 92)

Power comes to be viewed as strategic in this regard and often it is Machiavelli who is invoked as the admittedly scandalous godfather of this conception (by both Clegg and Foucault, for instance). Another contrast thus opens up between the causal, mechanical, episodic view of power, which Clegg regards as Hobbesian, and a strategic, fluid, ‘economic’ or dispositional view of power, which is Machiavellian.

Clegg presciently drew upon the early work of two French thinkers, Michel Callon and Bruno Latour, who have subsequently made influential interventions in science and technology studies and the study of economics. Their approach, sometimes termed actor-network theory or ANT, has more recently led Latour to the conclusion that:

‘Drunk with power’ is not an expression fit only for generals, presidents, CEOs, mad scientists, and bosses. It can also be used for those sociologists who confuse the expansion of powerful explanations with the composition of the collective. This is why the ANT slogan has always been: ‘Be sober with power’, that is, abstain as much as possible from using the notion of power in

case it backfires and hits your explanations instead of the target you are aiming for. There should be no powerful explanation without checks and balances. (2005: 260–1)

This conclusion thus juxtaposes the structural analysis of social scientists which presupposes some form of class, gender, racial, or economic, power structure, and the view that power is the outcome of a set of relations of forces, of different actors, technologies, materiality, forms of knowledge and so on. From this perspective, power takes the form of the resultant association and the concept cannot be used to explain anything.

Once again, we don't want to confuse cause and effect, the *explanandum* with the *explanans*. This is why it's so important to maintain that power, like society, is the final result of a process and not a reservoir, a stock, or a capital that will automatically provide an explanation. Power and domination have to be produced, made up, composed. (Latour, 2005: 63–4)

There have come to exist a plethora of terms, with their own nuances of course that describe this self-organizing 'economic' conception of power. The economy of power was inaugurated with Foucault in recent times but has a long history beginning with the notion of *oikonomia* as the management of the household, found in Aristotle and Xenophon. Foucault used the term *dispositif*, often translated into English as apparatus; it is, however, derived from the Latin *dispositio*, one translation of *oikonomia*. Latour and Callon, following Gilles Deleuze, use the term *agencement* or assemblage. These terms have been applied to science and technology, to law, and as if at last making a rendezvous with their own implicit destiny, to the work of economists in the production, or 'performation', of markets themselves (Callon, 2006).

All of this suggests how far we have come, just by following recent definitions and uses of the term power, by no means exhaustive but at least illustrative of a vast and rich literature, from the common-sense view of power and the 'power over' definitions we started with. Indeed, it is very hard to generalize about the study of power in the social and political sciences today if we take into account the extraordinary array of disciplines, debates, theories and approaches to the concept, from sociology, political science, anthropology, gender and cultural studies, to fields of management and organization studies.

But all these examples tell us something about the signature of power or at least where we might look to locate it.

## Signature of power

**1.4** At this point, you, as the reader, should be given thanks for your patience, and we can now state our initial hypothesis, which will be essayed in relation to the key texts and authors this book will address (especially those of Michel Foucault, Carl Schmitt and Giorgio Agamben). This hypothesis is that the concept of power is marked by a kind of permanent movement or reversibility between two poles, themselves changing as a consequence of this movement. The concept of power is only possible as a result of a series of binary distinctions, some of which we have touched on here. We have witnessed this in ‘power over’ and ‘power to’, power as capacity and power as right, the consensual and conflictual, and the episodic and economic. There are many more we haven’t précised: hard and soft power in Joseph Nye comes immediately to mind. Even when these poles are recognized as instances of something more fundamental, as when ‘power to’ and ‘power over’ are revealed as instances of power as capacity, this new concept exists only in opposition to something else, in this case power as right. Similarly, power as capacity and power as right are viewed as elements of juridical theory of sovereign power that is now opposed to the economic, dispositional and facilitative conception of power as an immanent domain of self-organizing forces.

What is distinctive about the concept of power is the way the notion refers us to a set of oppositions that in turn can become unities in relation to other oppositions. What the discussions of the concept of power thereby illustrate is that there is an ‘excess’ in the concept of power beyond what it might signify or mean, which marks it and forces this movement towards oppositions, their unification and further opposition. In the sense that ‘power’ is marked by this recurrent bipolarity, it is, to borrow and adapt a term from Agamben, less a concept and more a ‘signature’ attached to the concept of power (2009: 33–80).

We should, however, distinguish our use of the term from that of Agamben. Quite simply for our purposes the signature of the concept of power entails only three things:

- 1 That the concept of power is marked by a determinate but historically changing field of interpretative and pragmatic relations, which is very difficult, if not impossible, to evade or escape.
- 2 That to engage with and use the concept of ‘power’, we need to recognize its signature, understand how it operates and the different forms it takes, and mobilize it in our analyses.
- 3 That an analytics of power, the project initiated but not fulfilled by Foucault, cannot be accomplished without this because the signature of power is integral to how we think about, exercise and experience power relations in our societies.

It is too early to make further claims than these about the signature of power. We will be careful not to place the signature of power in a specific ‘discursive formation’, ‘episteme’, ‘paradigm’, or ‘rationality’, that is, in any framing that denotes a particular temporal or spatial ordering of knowledge or discourse. Neither do we propose the signature as a general interpretative concept, make any claim about concepts in general, nor make any claim about the ineluctable movement of concepts from one domain to another, such as from the sacred to the profane, or the theological to the political, unlike many of the thinkers we shall discuss.

We simply observe that the signature is present in much European-derived political thought since at least the ‘early-modern’ period of the seventeenth century, if not before, and can be found in most, if not all, contemporary academic discussions in disciplines such as political science, sociology and jurisprudence. Rather than proposing a general account of the source of the concept of power in Christian theology, our central concern is the way this signature places power (which in its most basic semantics is nothing more than capacity or potentiality in the sense of the word ‘can’) into a political domain, both in the narrow sense of the government of the state, including its law-making and law-enforcing activities, and in the broader sense of the antagonistic relations between groups internally characterized by a degree of unanimity. Our central concern is thus with the renovation of the concept of power through an understanding of its signature and how it works.

The concern here, as we put it before, is with the architecture or structure of family relations of concepts of power. While we are interested in the claims of those thinkers who link political concepts,

particularly power, to a theological inheritance, we make no general claims that the signature of power explains its inheritance from theology, or that its signature necessarily refers power back to these theological origins, or that the signature substitutes for the empirical analysis of the transfers among theological, political and economic domains. Indeed we do not invoke a general theory of signatures but start with the observation and the demonstration, undoubtedly located in time and place, that the concepts of power widely in use today in both expert and everyday language bear this signature. We are thus interested in claims for the theological eminence of concepts and practices of power, advanced in different ways by Schmitt, Weber, Agamben and even Foucault, to the extent that we find in these claims the possibility of a broadening and deepening, elaborating and rectifying, of existing assumptions or accounts concerning the concept of power. For these thinkers, and indeed for most discussions of the recent social and political sciences, the key form of the signature can be broadly expressed as the relationship between sovereignty and reign, on the one hand, and economic management and government, or governance, on the other.

Indeed, if there is anything that unites our three principal characters here, it is their common recognition of the appearance of similar signatures of power in their own work and the three different ways in which they seek to escape them. Perhaps the most contentious of our propositions is that all three can be viewed as failing not in their attempts to escape them but because they think it is necessary to make such an attempt.

We are not in a position to say whether the signature of power is a universal feature of all concepts and practices of power. It is, however, certainly very widespread and, as such, provides us with a perspective that will allow us to examine the intellectual struggles of important and influential thinkers and, with their help, to open up and envisage the various fields of investigation their work portends.

## About this book

**1.5** It is customary to add a small guide at this point to allow the reader to navigate through the book. But the form that this book takes is not so much a rational or pedagogical order as an unfolding of an engagement with something of a mystery. The book looks for stories, clues and exemplars, and searches for notions of

power in the studies of symbols and rituals, and in obscure debates. The reader should be warned that they will find discussion of diverse topics such as the ‘savage life’, angels, and secrets. They will find the passage that links the ancient oral rites of the Arunta people in central Australia to Agamben’s most recent conception of power. The book refuses to reduce the mystery of this basic concept and, like every good mystery, it begins with a murder. This one unfortunately is real and still, tragically, unsolved. It ends with a ceremony of state. At many points, the reader will find we return to an epigram that acts as a touchstone for our investigation: ‘the King reigns, but he does not govern’.

The next three chapters (Chapters 2, 3 and 4), ‘The Shadow of the Sovereign’, ‘Economies of Power’ and ‘The Prince and the Population’, start with Foucault and trace his own difficult and ambiguous legacy. This allows us to introduce the three key concepts of sovereignty, governmentality and biopolitics, and the program of a genealogy of the arts of government. Foucault’s discussions of liberalism and neo-liberalism are important signposts, and we return to these rationalities of power during the book. If there is an overall theme to Foucault’s thinking on power it is the recurrent search for a new form of power, or a new critique or concept of power, which will allow him, and us, to escape the shadow of sovereignty. Chapter 4 uses recent scholarship on Machiavelli and Malthus to question Foucault’s narrative of a governmental shift from sovereignty and territory to security and population. In its final sections, we begin to grasp Foucault’s legacy and see our own intellectual physiognomy in his.

The next two chapters (Chapters 5 and 6), ‘Enemy Secrets’ and ‘Secular Orders’, introduce our second principal character, Carl Schmitt, but keep what we have learnt from Foucault in play. We thus approach Schmitt through what we have discovered in Foucault, and Schmitt’s thought provides another perspective on Foucault. We compare them on a range of themes, including the political, legitimacy, sovereignty, government and international law. We will find Schmitt’s relationship with his teacher, Max Weber, exceptionally important, and follow Schmitt into the core of his political theology and the debate on secularization of the 1960s, which engaged Karl Löwith and Hans Blumenberg, among others. This is a debate that casts Foucault’s search for a new, non-sovereign power in a different light and so too his claims about pastoral power. Schmitt certainly makes a central contribution to our theme of sovereignty, particularly in its restriction to a set of competences rather than an image



of omniscience and omnipotence. Yet ‘order’ (in the form of *nomos* and concrete order) also starts to become significant, and refers us back to the sources of ‘neoliberalism’ in the German ‘Ordoliberal’, who are analysed by Foucault and interlocutors of Schmitt. Between Foucault’s governmental atheism and Schmitt’s political theology it is, tellingly, the Ordoliberals who, drawing on medieval thought, seek an ‘economic theology’.

The final two chapters (Chapter 7 and 8), ‘Reign and Government’ and ‘Glorious Acclaim’, are extended meditations that use Giorgio Agamben’s most recent work as their source. Again, Foucault and Schmitt are kept in play. Given what we have learnt in the previous chapters, we will primarily be concerned with Agamben’s economic theology or what he calls a ‘theological genealogy of the economy and government’. We shall follow some of the common references and sources that link Agamben to Foucault or to Schmitt, such as theologians from Gregory of Nazianus to Erik Peterson, political theorists and economists such as Rousseau, Adam Smith and the Physiocrats, or the dense strands and knots that bind much of twentieth-century German sociology, economics and jurisprudence to Weber. The question of order, inherited from medieval cosmology, becomes even more central, but so too do the miracle and the event, and splendour and publicity in the form of the glorification and acclamation of divine and worldly sovereign rule. We shall offer a diagnosis of Agamben’s political anthropology of ‘sabbatism’ and ‘inoperativity’.

The reader should be aware that none of our main characters will be spared strong criticism when it is warranted, even if they have built a platform that allows us to begin to glimpse something of the new continent to which our voyage has taken us. The reader will find, at the end of Chapter 8, an outline of the features of the rich fields of study this discussion helps us envisage, and some conclusions concerning the three concepts of fields of power: sovereignty, governmentality and biopolitics.

Each chapter is divided into a number of small sections. Each section was a kind of exercise that allowed the author the freedom to pursue the by-ways, clues and little stories that edged his understanding forward or perhaps simply increased the pleasure of the journey, often by allowing him to keep good or even bad company. Hopefully the sections are coherent in themselves but the reader should understand they are part of a much more intricate puzzle whose pieces include not only our three thinkers, but other major figures, intellectual and political movements, concepts and debates. The argument emerges

at times through this discontinuous investigation. It takes place, as Foucault once said of his own work, 'between unfinished abutments and anticipatory strings of dots' (2001: 223). To remedy this, at the end of each chapter, there is a section (in one case, two) that summarizes and signposts what has been discovered and prepares for the next stage of the journey. In any case, this has been a most enjoyable book to write and hopefully it will also be enjoyable to read.