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Power and authority in schooling and education in South Africa

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situation by adding the proviso that, "the end be their [i.e. the 'barbarians'] improvement, and the means justified by actually effecting that end".(21) To the extent that the position depends on agreement surrounding terms such as 'improvement' and 'barbarian', it casts doubt on the viability of the distinction that Mill makes between power and authority.

The discussion so far has outlined a general historical background to the concepts of power and authority, from their separate origins in Roman thought, to their treatment by particular philosophers from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. The issues they have raised have highlighted a dilemma that has faced social and political thinking and which has provided a unifying theme for the discussion i.e. the appropriate relationship between power and authority. In general, the thinking of Calvin and Hobbes is a defiant response to the merging of power and authority under the auspices of the Roman Catholic Church and it reflects a struggle to assert an independence from the Church, rather than a concern, which becomes more apparent later in Rousseau and J.S. Mill, to distinguish between the concepts of power and authority. Throughout, the underlying tendency of the concepts of power and authority away from their roots in the Christian Church has been discernible. In the following section they will be

examined as they occur within the context of a paradigm particularly pervasive in the Twentieth century, although not usually appreciated in terms of its political dimensions, namely, positivism.

Section iii) Twentieth Century Positivism

Science, in seeking to explain and predict the phenomena of the natural world, has through its discoveries and technological successes asserted the validity of its procedures and demonstrated man's power to control the natural environment. Positivist social science aims to emulate this example and to achieve the same results in the social environment.

Rejecting traditional attempts (for example, those of the political philosophers discussed earlier) at understanding human society, because this knowledge is regarded as neither objective nor verifiable, positivist social science applies the methods of established scientific enquiry. It is concerned only with observable, empirical events (i.e. facts, not values) that it seeks to explain in terms of the Covering Law model which requires the stipulation of dependent variable expressed in nomological statements, so that whenever a and b, then c must follow. On the basis of these causal

explanations social science will be in a position to make predictions concerning phenomena under its study with a view to exercising control over them. Throughout the entire process the positivist position lays claim to being value-free and neutral, i.e. it is non-ideological in that it serves no particular interests; its sole objective being the impartial pursuit of scientific knowledge.

This description of positivist social science obviously does not take into account important differences among its various proponents; it merely serves to outline some of the salient features which have a bearing on my argument. Positivist social science has invited numerous criticisms, but for my purposes, those related to a causal explanation of human behaviour clearly demonstrate its failure to distinguish between the concepts of power and authority.

R.S. Peters (25) attacks the account of human behaviour implicit in the Covering Law model of positivist social science. Action is not a 'collection of movements' but rather gets its sense from the end or purpose in mind, arising out of a social context. Even a simple action, such as 'waving to a friend' cannot be reduced to movements of the body. Peters demonstrates this by distinguishing between types of explanations as in 'his-

reason' and 'the-reason', emphasizing that man is a rule-following animal whose behaviour must be understood against the background of social conventions. The former reason entails a conscious objective, while the latter is similar to a causal explanation.

Crude physiological explanations can never specify an action exhaustively in terms of bodily movements but can only lay down general necessary conditions. Conventions or rules are implicit in the concept of action and these rules cannot be deduced from statements about mere movements. Peters isolates three areas in which causal theories are relevant to human actions :

1) to specify the necessary conditions for human action to occur,
2) to show that some individual differences might depend on differences in the necessary conditions, and
3) to offer an explanation when there is a deviation from the normal i.e. in cases of failure to act.

Otherwise, a causal account can never offer a sufficient or complete explanation of normal human behaviour because it denies the possibility of purposive, rule-following behaviour implied in the concept of authority.

The attempt, illustrated above, to contain within a single, overall theory the diversity of human action rests on an assumption: namely that there is, in human affairs, one correct explanation and that it is only in terms of a positivist social science that this might be uncovered - which brings me to a consideration of the role of experts in 'policy science'.

Policy science may be described as providing the most expedient and/or technically correct way of proceeding in order to realise a specific goal. Of importance in this respect is the policy scientist, social engineer or expert who on the basis of the scientific knowledge available recommends appropriate courses of action to governments and institutions in implementing their decisions and policies.

Within this framework, experts and policy scientists on the basis of their specialized, scientific knowledge are invested with a status that commands respect and compliance, while reducing their accountability, since the non-scientist is not equipped to evaluate and assess their decisions. This demonstrates a failure to distinguish between the concepts of power and authority, in that the greater the stress laid on expert advice and techniques, the fewer the opportunities for those unqualified in a specialized area to exercise initia-

tive, creativity, disagreement and independence of thought. Instead, the reliance on rigorous procedures and experts fostered by positivist social science, would reduce participation in the democratic process and facilitate the adoption of attitudes typified in a relationship of power; namely conformity, acquiescence and obedience.

Brian Fay (26) argues that the positivist model of social science leads to what he calls a 'technological view of politics' as characterized in policy science. This has significance for my argument in that it illustrates the way in which power relations regulate human behaviour.

Fay traces a conceptual link between positivism and policy science which has political implications. While the dichotomy between means and ends restricts science to solving technical problems, implicit in its approach is the tacit presumption of a correct solution so that the focus of political debate shifts from differences of opinion about what ought to be i.e. ends, to a preoccupation with instrumentalist questions, 'how?' i.e. means. As the 'scientific attitude' becomes more pervasive, the ends of politics become less controversial and discussion is impoverished so that the opportunities for envisaging alternatives are curtailed.

Furthermore, with its emphasis on efficiency, productivity and technology, policy science would be likely to perceive human behaviour as a means towards fulfilling these objectives and therefore, inclined to maintain the dominant-submissive status of existing power relations. Thus, Fay contends, instead of operating according to 'impartial criteria of efficiency', a policy scientific approach is biased towards supporting the features of industrial society in such a way that any fundamental questioning of its basic arrangements would be ruled out. Under these conditions, the possibilities for explaining human behaviour in terms of authority are virtually non-existent.

In conflating the concepts of power and authority both positivist social science and its expression in policy science, fail to understand human behaviour as it is expressed in the concept of authority. The relevance of positivist social science, despite its claim to being the only legitimate source of knowledge, must be limited to offering an insight into only one aspect of the human condition i.e. that which is implied in the concept of power. Policy science is similarly restricted, through its tendency to focus on instrumentalist questions in political debate and through its conservative bias towards streamlining the status quo by perpetuating

inegalitarian social relations of dominance and subservience.

Thus, in their location within the domain of science, the concepts of power and authority are indistinguishable as a result of the primary task of science to explain phenomena in terms of cause and effect. Through its procedures and remarkable achievements in this area, science has won credibility as a predominant source of authority in the modern world, so much so, that it is sometimes accorded a mystical respect. As such, it has access to power and may be seen to offer a grounding for various ideologies of which one, policy science, described above, provides an example.

Reinforced by claims to being 'objective' and 'scientific', these ideologies may be used in order to win acceptance for political arrangements, but, as it has been shown, their relevance is limited to a description of behaviour in terms of power. Consequently, any attempt they may make towards explaining what constitutes a large proportion of normal human behaviour with reference to reasons, rules, intention, etc. characterized by the concept 'authority', must be severely emasculated. "Since science is one of the chief shibboleths of the present age",(27) it is important that the ideological content of many of the doctrines it

supports, be uncovered and their use strictly confined to their particular areas of application.

Summary : Part I

The discussion in this section has attempted to illustrate the movement of the web of concepts connected with power and authority from the Church to their contemporary resting place in science, by outlining their classical and early Christian origins, through their development in the political philosophies of Calvin, Hobbes, Rousseau and J.S. Mill to their expression in positivism.

In tracing the movement from their location in the Church to one in the context of science, comment has also been made on the extent to which the varying positions distinguish (or fail to distinguish) between 'power' and 'authority'. In the next section I hope to clarify some of the important differences between power and authority.

PART II : POWER AND AUTHORITY

The various interpretations given to power and authority cannot be divorced from the political philosophy of the writer in question. Conservative theorists, for instance, have always clung to traditional forms of authority as being responsible for the preservation of social stability. Their position, often labelled as reactionary, has been associated with authoritarianism and invited criticisms from liberals, who see authority as restricting individual freedom and from socialists, who see it as entrenching inequality. Implicit in each of these interpretations is an inclination to conflate the concepts of power and authority.

Without endorsing the conservative position which is hampered by a certain inflexibility, there is a strong case to be made for authority, as distinct from power; a case in which the role of authority is emphasized as upholding moral and intellectual standards as well as in guaranteeing personal and political freedom in contrast to the operation of arbitrary power. It is this case which I want to put forward here.

My approach will be to elucidate a concept of authority from which inferences about power can be drawn, rather than to focus explicitly on a concept of power. In this way, the differences between power and authority will begin to emerge.

For Peter Winch, upon whose interpretation of authority I base my account,(1) authority is the central concept which regulates the conditions under which a collection of individuals is entitled to be referred to as a human society. It is the presence of authority relations that tempers the unity characteristic of a civil society and which distinguishes this society from one that constitutes what Peters calls a 'natural whole' (2), i.e. the former is regulated in terms of rules, whereas the latter may be explained with reference to nomological statements or laws and they are logically profoundly different from each other.

Rules can only be understood in specifically social contexts and can never function to explain and predict human behaviour in the same way that nomological statements seek to establish causal relations between variables. They may only provide reasons for deciding how to act. There are parallels for the distinction between power and authority in the way rules are

embedded in authority, while power is expressed through a casual relationship.

There may be a difference of opinion as to what constitutes a rule but there can be no doubt over whether there should be rules or not as a consequence of the notion of a human will which is capable of deliberating and choosing; a pre-disposition that distinguishes man from animals. The consensus about the need to regulate behaviour according to rules mediated by authority (as opposed to natural laws) is unique to what we understand as a human society. Consequently, any account of the nature of human society must involve a consideration of how concepts shape human relations and this would exclude a causal explanation in terms of instinct or conditioned reflex.

Authority constitutes a fundamental characteristic of human society in that it implies rules which establish right and wrong ways of behaving in a particular situation. To follow a rule involves what Wittgenstein calls 'agreement to go on in the same way' i.e. authority depends on the participants sharing a conceptual scheme, so that to enter into a relation of authority implies a common level of understanding between parties in terms of a shared normative order. It means that any decision about what is right or wrong in a given situation can

never entirely be a matter of personal whim; it presupposes an agreement to conform to certain objective criteria. Thus, as Winch suggests:

> ...there is an intimate conceptual connexion between the notion of authority on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the notion of there being a right and wrong way of doing things.(3)

In contrast to authority relations where participants must share a common conceptual scheme, a relationship of power involves an unequal interaction in terms of the dominant and dominated, where the latter's definition of the situation is irrelevant to its outcome. For example, I may exercise power over a child by virtue of superior strength, knowledge, experience etc. in order to elicit a response which is in no way dependent upon the understanding of the child. Consequently, power would seem to signify a means whereby an individual or group subordinates others to the demands of his/her or their wishes through the exercise of physical/phychological coercion or through the manipulation of rewards or the influence of personal factors. Whatever the appropriate means, the impetus is external, so that the behaviour occurs as a result of factors outside the individual's control.

In any human activity then, authority represents established ways of proceeding, so that individuals or groups may come to occupy authoritative positions with respect to particular activities. This does not mean that their role is to exert some kind of influence on others, for authority, as opposed to power, is an internal relation. It acts as an intermediary between the participants, defining the conventions of the activity in which they are mutually engaged. For example, in a learning situation to which the participants voluntarily submit themselves, the teacher and the students are internally related through the students' acceptance of the teacher's authority on what counts as right in the subject under instruction.

Yet, to submit to authority is not the same as being subject to power. It does not mean the curtailment of personal liberty; on the contrary, authority is a necessary precondition for liberty. In order to be able to choose freely, one must be able to consider reasons which arise from the context of rules. Without rules, which are mediated by authority, it would be unintelligible to exercise freedom because there would be no reasons for behaving in a particular way (other than to avoid the imposition of arbitrary constraints). For example, in art an individual must share an understanding of the rules governing the use of

techniques before s/he is able to exercise freedom in breaking or modifying rules in a meaningful way. Thus, to accept authority is to affirm the opportunity for exercising freedom of choice. Conversely, to reject authority in order to safeguard the practice of liberty must needs be a contradiction in terms, as it would deny a space for the operation of rules (which are conceptually inseparable from authority), creating a situation in which the notion of freedom could gain no purchase.

Not all situations, however, involve the voluntary acceptance of authority. With reference to specific examples, Winch nevertheless shows that these cases need not lead to the denial of freedom as implied in a concept of power. For example, in adult-child relationships it is not authority that deprives the child of freedom, but rather a lack of knowledge and experience. Authority, as expressed through rules, provides a means whereby the child will acquire conceptual schemes of social life and thus, ultimately, be able to exercise freedom.

Another dimension of authority is revealed through the notion of autonomy. Without reason, the concept of autonomy would be incongruous as it necessarily implies a moral action involving a rational (as opposed to an arbitrary) decision based on the assessment of various

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