

Gianfranco Poggi

Andreas Anter, "Theorien der Macht. Zur Einführung". Hamburg: Junius Verlag, 2012, 171 pp.

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## Book Review

**Andreas Anter, *Theorien der Macht. Zur Einführung*. Hamburg: Junius Verlag, 2012, 171 pp.**

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The author of this valuable book, a political scientist, has recently moved from the University of Lipsia to that of Erfurt. This new book of his confirms the high opinion of him which I had formed from reading and reviewing two previous ones, *Max Weber's theory of the modern state* [1996] and *The power of order: Aspects of a fundamental category of the political* [2007]. The present treatment of "theories of power", in spite of the relatively short length imposed upon it by the format of the "*Zur Einführung*" series in which it appears, gives a sustained, wide-ranging, clear account of its topic. The first chapter deals with "Hobbes and his predecessors" (chiefly, Thucydides and Machiavelli), the second with authors who do not all figure as "the usual suspects": Burkhardt, Nietzsche, and Lord Acton. Both chapters, however, serve essentially as preliminaries to the real business of Anter's. He undertakes it in chapter 3, by reviewing Max Weber's thinking on power, and performs it in rest of the book by dealing successively with four contemporary authors, all familiar with Weber's contribution and more or less expressly engaged in interpreting it, complementing it and/or controverting with it.

The first author is Heinrich Popitz, who between 1959 and 2002 held sociology chairs first at Basel (where Karl Jaspers had supervised his doctoral dissertation on the young Marx's theory of alienation) then at Freiburg. Here Anter was one of the many young social scientists on whom Popitz's inspired teaching made a profound and lasting impression.

Some of the best work of this insufficiently recognized social theorist concerns precisely the theme of power, and is embodied in two successive editions of his *Phaenomene der Macht*, published by Mohr [Siebeck]. One key aspect of this major contribution to the theme of power is its grounding in a form of "philosophical anthropology" that is in a sustained consideration of those aspects of human nature which make the power phenomenon an inescapable component of all forms of society. For instance, Popitz reconnoitres diverse vulnerabilities of the species, generating in individuals respectively fear, hunger, and a need to make sense of their presence in the world. These vulnerabilities are addressed and "leveraged" by distinct power forms, conventionally labelled political, economic, and ideological. To these, in his later essays, Popitz added a form rooted in human creativity - the capacity for some individuals, through "technical action," to modify the material circumstances under which other individuals live and operate. Popitz made further distinctive contributions to the problematics of power - for instance his discussions of violence (*Gewalt*), of the dimensions and the typical phases in the institutionalization of political power, or of the ways in which power asymmetries may spontaneously develop in such apparently equalitarian contexts as a cruise ship, a concentration camp, or a juvenile borstal.

The next author Anter discusses is Hannah Arendt. He devotes less attention than is currently fashionable to her treatment of the Eichmann story, while recognizing the significance of the problem of evil it raises. His focus is on *The origins of totalitarianism*

[1951] and above all on her later, more analytically oriented writings, particularly *The human condition* [1958] and the essay *On violence* [1972]. Anter appreciates particularly Arendt's express dissociation, in those and other texts, between power and violence; she views violence itself not as a ground or an expression of power but as a manifestation of its failure.

This insight is shared by the remaining two authors, Foucault and Luhmann. But Anter dissents from the current emphasis by other authors on Foucault's contribution to the power problematic. Of course he does enlighten us as to many significant power processes, including some previously neglected. But his rejection of previous definitions of power itself is not complemented by an express, alternative definition of his own. Above all, Foucault's understanding of the power phenomenon is much too diffuse, overlaps it with too many other phenomena, such as knowledge. Furthermore, some of Foucault's significant contributions lend themselves to overstatement. Anter notices this, in particular, in Foucault's emphasis on surveillance. For instance, his renowned discussion of panopticon forgets that as early as 1811 the attempt to embody systematically Bentham's imagery in the design of jails was abandoned. More broadly, Anter finds untenable Foucault's contention that modernity's turn to imprisonment as the chief sanction for anti-social conduct becomes a disciplinary design of society at large.

“[According to Foucault] it changes modern society as a whole into ‘an archipelago of jails’.....But if the entire society becomes a jail, why then do people seek to avoid imprisonment? Clearly the jail differs from its external environment”.

Foucault's view of the modern state as the site of “totalising” power is also untenable. The very concept of the state presupposes its distinction from society, and the co-existence of different power spheres, such as public and private; secular and religious. In sum, Anter associates himself with such critics of Foucault as Nancy Fraser, Charles Taylor, or Hans-Ulrich Wehler.

For Luhmann, as is well-known, power is a medium of communication rendered necessary by the fact that society is constituted by a plurality of self-referential systems. It does not necessarily establish and uphold an asymmetric relationship between those constituents. In Luhmann-on-power, there is nobody who affirms his own will over against that of others and causes otherwise inexistent effects. Anter finds objectionable these vacancies, which contradict near-universal tendencies in theoretical treatments of the power phenomenon. But he finds some merit in alternative emphases in Luhmann's own treatment. The latter, for instance, sharply downgrades the conventional concern with leadership in organizations, but more than compensates for this with by perceptively analyzing processes of administration, which often reduce the actual significance of leaders, assigning to them a prevalently symbolic role. That role, however, is far from appearing insignificant to Luhmann, given his emphasis on communication processes.

In Anter's book, the focus placed on relatively few theorists of power does not exclude an awareness of the contributions made by others, or of their exegeses of those same theorists. This is evident from a significant body of footnotes [pp. 139-160], containing very numerous bibliographical references. I have only one major reservation concerning the content of what I personally consider, in spite of its size, a major contribution to the literature on power. Its focus, it seems to me, is too prevalently (exclusively?)

on what one may call the domestic manifestations of power, those internal to otherwise constituted and ordered societies, organizations, or other bodies. For instance, Anter repeatedly uses the term “security,” but chiefly in the hobbesian understanding of it, which bears on relations between a multitude of private individuals. What is (largely) missing is the alternative, machiavellian meaning of security, bearing on relations between collective, sovereign entities. This is a legitimate preference of the author’s; but it seems odd for a German author basically to bypass the significance of phenomena signalled, among other things, by the title of Ranke’s masterwork, *Die grossen Maechte*, or (in the Wilhelmine era) by such expressions as *Machtpolitik*.

*Gianfranco Poggi*  
University of Virginia