

POWER IN COMMUNITARIAN EVOLUTION

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INTRODUCTION

World Ordering (Adler 2019) is an exceptional work in that it ties several modes of theorising together. Based on an intersubjective, relational and processual ontology, it gives rise to a social world both in flux and as flux, in what Adler calls 'evolution'. It anchors such evolution in a theory of action where the driving forces of change, communities of practice, are socially embedded in, and perhaps even constituted by, background dispositions. This, in turn, informs a theory of history in that social evolution is understood in terms of learning that works both as a normatively open analytical concept (learning is learning) and, eventually, also as a normative yardstick (not all learning is true or good learning). From here it goes on to combine this cognitive evolution with a political theory that envisages anew the perennial quest for the understanding of a more or less communitarian order, i.e. the central and yet unreachable core of the study of politics.

Needless to say, such an enterprise cannot and should not be understood in terms of being a final word. Its ambition is twofold, one as a plea for this particular vision of world ordering, and also as an invitation to follow this strategy of parallel theorising. Just as much as it aims to make a point of how to think *order*, it makes a point on *how to think* order. The many threads and levels of theorising are hence not meant to impress the reader with a long and varied bibliography; they require each other. Whether or not Adler envisaged to cover them all from the start is a moot question; he certainly became convinced that he needed to consider them for reaching the ambition of the book. The more the research advanced, the heavier it became. If he had lost the momentum, the weight easily could have become overpowering.

My intervention is an attempt to see how power travels with Adler on this multiple journey. This does not mean that power is the most important concept in the book, but it is sufficiently central to use it as a way to approach Adler's theorising. For power has itself been used in all these different types of theorising and can therefore serve as a privileged entrance point to see how the different types of theories meet. In the realm of ontology, power has often been likened to, and sometimes even used interchangeably with, agency and cause. To be considered agential, a capacity to 'change' something in the social world (= power) is often considered a constitutive feature. And since it involves an effect, power has been likened to cause (famously in Dahl 1968, Guzzini 2017, for a critique and discussion, see Morriss 1987). For this reason, both agency and power often appear in frameworks that work on change and its causes.

In a theory of action, this ontological closeness of power to agency and cause turns power into a central explanatory variable whenever the underlying political theory ties action to struggle or competition. This is obviously the case for political realism, where power is not only the means but also always the immediate aim of

international actors, whatever other aims the actor may have (see e.g. the verbatim passages in Morgenthau 1945, 14, 1946, 195). In other social theories, power is however not the explanans but the explanandum. Rather than explaining action or behaviour, power is likened to government or social-political order that needs to be itself explained. When power features prominently in such conceptions of order, theories of action turn into theories of domination. Power is linked to the logic of a political order as a structured configuration that is asymmetrical and/or hierarchical. This again mobilises a certain set of political theories that not only systematically link all power to order but, more contentiously, also all order to power. Yet even if power systematically refers to order, order does not need to be defined through power.

Power has also been used prominently in some theories of history. It is fundamental for Social Darwinism, that is, the idea that human evolution is about the 'survival of the fittest', connected to the struggle with and for power. Such theories reach IR usually via the backdoor of geopolitical writings that implicitly or explicitly rely on environmental (i.e. natural) determinacy. They are often part of the realist family of theories. Yet also other theories than realism have mobilised it (see the discussion in Hobson 2012), and not all realists would subscribe to it (see the discussion in Guzzini 2012c).

In the following I discuss Adler's use of both deontic and performative power within his vision of social orders before turning to the usage of 'epistemic practical authority' as an explanatory factor. In the first context, I argue that his conceptual decisions are driven by a certain understanding of politics. It is this vision of politics which informs many of the choices concerning not only how to use and define power, but also his general theory of cognitive evolution. In the end, it is a certain commitment to communitarianism (earlier referred to as such in Adler 2005) that provides coherence to his theoretical and conceptual choices. In the second context, Adler uses epistemic practical authority as a cause for explaining the evolution of social orders. In doing so, as I show, he overburdens what such a power concept can deliver when a process oriented and contingent meta-theory would allow for explanations only at a lower level of abstraction.

POWER: DEONTIC AND PERFORMATIVE

Adler locates the analysis of power mainly in his theory of action which fundamentally is a theory of practices. He uses two concepts of power that are important for two different moments in the understanding of action, namely *deontic power* which he takes from John Searle's (2010) revised constructivist social theory, and *performative power*, which Adler borrows from Jeffrey Alexander's (2011) cultural pragmatics. Whereas Searle's concept will provide him with the socially or intersubjectively dispositions which can empower actors (here as communities of practice), Alexander's concept allows him to include an improvisational moment of performance into the analysis in which such dispositions can, but also cannot, be realised and potentially changed. Audiences

are the silent but consequential backdrop against which deontic power can arise and the visible sphere where performances can affect them, but also where the credibility of these performances is negotiated. As this section will argue, his particular re-conceptualisation of these two concepts and his concomitant downgrading of understandings of power in terms of domination are not pre-ordained by his underlying social theory but instead are prompted by a certain political theory based on communitarian agency.

Searle's status functions carry "deontic powers." That is, they carry rights, duties, obligations, requirements, permissions, authorisations, entitlements, and so on' (Searle 2010, 8–9). It fits the meta-theoretical setup in that it includes an idea of performativity. Searle thinks of it as constituting (sic) social ontologies; consequently, it connects well to the constructivist and process ontology of Adler's theory where all entities are continuously 'in the making' and where their 'being' is in the 'becoming'.

'Performative power means using the contingency of interpretations and performances, the figures and forms of script to impose their meaning onto others' (Adler 2019, 112). It responds to the relational demands of the ontology in that it connects power to an audience, or, put differently, establishes the origins of authority in a certain type of symbolically shared action where power originates from the audience. Although often connected to the idea of 'performativity' in the text, it is merely about the power of or through performance. It therefore fits a stronger concept of performativity much less so than deontic power, since it does not rely on an interactive ontological process, in which social reality is generated by our representations of it.

It is Adler who then slightly re-arranges those two concepts which, although combinable, do not stem from the same tradition. When Adler uses 'deontic power', he shifts the focus to the agency of the community of practice rather than to the conditions for the possibility of that very agency. This means that sometimes deontic power reads more like the *effect* of power relations rather than their very *condition*. In writing from an agential perspective, Adler explains 'power [SG: here not specified] enters practitioners' competence and performative capacity to transform their communities of practice endogenously, as well as to affect the boundaries of their communities of practice, and endow material and social processes with collective meaning, particularly functions and status, thus creating entitlements (deontic power)' (Adler 2019, 176). The causal 'power' at the start of the sentence will be of interest to us in the subsequent section. For the purpose of the argument here, suffice it to know that deontic power is the effect of practices or the agency of the community of practices (contextualised through background knowledge), since it 'rests on the collective creation and recognition of, and confidence in, these institutions' statuses and functions over time' (Adler 2019, 67).

Importantly, this is different from Searle, for whom deontic powers (sic, in plural) come in a chain of social ontologies, but not at the start. According to Searle, collective intentionality creates institutional facts like status functions which carry

(or: create, see Searle 2010, 24) deontic powers which, in turn, provide desire-independent reasons for action (Searle 2010, 23). Status functions can 'carry' negative deontic powers (e.g. obligations) or positive ones (e.g. rights). Obviously, such status 'exist only to the extent that they are recognised and accepted as existing' (Searle 2010, 88). But it is those status functions which endow agents with their deontic powers: agents are, to use another language, dis/empowered by them. Yet these can be seen as two sides of the same coin. Searle's deontic powers concentrates on the processes which dis/empower actors, whereas Adler focuses on the recognition within social environments, the communities of practices, which are necessary for their creation and ongoing existence. Yet it is consequential, if one concentrates only on one of the two sides, in that it downgrades the way that 'background power' (Searle) conditions our dispositions.

Indeed, Searle uses his theory as a way to connect the discussion of power to the analysis of political order and individual freedom, to political theory. Deontic powers are both the cement of society, and part of his approach to understand the idea of free will. When this is translated into a social theory, Searle refers to (and borrows the idea from) Bourdieu. But Adler does explicitly not want to follow him there (to this, below).

Adler's second component of power is found through Jeffrey Alexander's idea of performative power. It is also embedded in a political theory that cannot be really divided from how it is used in social theory. Alexander (2011, chapter 2) opposes a vertical, materialist and coercive vision of the (democratic) order. Instead, he develops a historical discussion in which classical *Gemeinschaft* and the taken-for-granted rituals that performatively constitute communities have to be replaced by performances that unite the different spheres of society. Hence, such power, and the order it constitutes, is not automatic or guaranteed; it is in a constant re-fashion and process, dependent on the way audiences accept the symbolic proposals of their elite. In other words, his theory of domination is not primarily inspired by a social theory of process, but by a political theory of possible democratic government. Alexander's main aim is to show that such vertical order is shot through with the ordering role of rituals or performances. As a result, his opposition to a materialist and coercive version of rule does not exclude, indeed relies upon, an understanding of informal rule that make successful performances possible. Coercion and domination have been disentangled; there are indeed non-coercive versions of domination. Again, the second concept of power seems almost to invite an analysis which looks at processes of domination which are not necessarily agential, but of informal rule, of dis/empowering and where the social conditioning of dispositions is significant. But Adler chooses not to go this way. For him, power will not be particularly connected to domination but more instead to agency and change.

A comparison with the social theory of Pierre Bourdieu – sometimes inspiration, sometimes whipping boy in Adler's book – may help to clarify this take. The two approaches are very similar. According to Bourdieu, fields, habitus and practices are co-constituted in a relational manner. Adler engages a very similar setup, with

background knowledge as Searle's usage of Bourdieu's habitus (Searle 1995, 132). Such knowledge informs practices in both approaches, but then there is one difference. As Adler says, he substitutes Bourdieu's concept of habitus with the concept of practice (Adler 2019, 18). This sounds odd since habitus clearly corresponds to background knowledge, and practice appears as a concept in both approaches. But the sentence may become clearer once we look at the conceptualisation of agency in both approaches. In Bourdieu, fields have to be seen individually, and in their combination, to figure out the existence of social groups, in his case: classes. Critical of a certain Marxist take to reduce the genesis of collective actors to purely materialistically established classes, his analysis of multiple fields is exactly meant to show the fluidity of the boundaries of social groups and their multiple constitutive components (and capitals), as well as the diversity of practices and hence political action which can ensue. In the end, although there is lots of agency within the field, Bourdieu's interest in agents is usually tied to the way their positioning co-constitutes an order.

Adler includes the concept of field in his 'communities of practice' which are 'simultaneously, (a) social and spatial structural sites where the emergence and selective retention of practice takes place and (b) collective agents whose actions matter for social order's metastability or, alternatively, its evolution' (Adler 2019, 123). This is curious, since it mixes sites and agency. Also, it does not reflect on the 'sens pratique' which provides the logic (and interpretive background) for the field, reduced to a topography of collective action (but then, 'social orders' are also fields, see Adler (2019, 21). In doing so, Adler really wishes to foreground agency. The driving force here are communities of practice, who, like classes, are the bearers of historical evolution.

In this context, Adler considers power as domination to be a hindrance to his approach. He tries to stay clear from what he would see as too horizontal and too materialist conceptualisations of power, for which he criticises Bourdieu's field theory.¹ Indeed, at times, it reads as if for Adler, theories of domination are necessarily linked to vertical analyses of power and to structuralism and materialism. But they are not. Foucault-inspired analysis or different versions of intersectional analysis, none of which is treated in the book, are all about more horizontal understandings of how domination works. But for Adler, domination is too much about positions, about hierarchies, and most centrally, about stasis, while the book tries to understand change. For him, Bourdieu's 'interest in explaining power stratification [SG?] and social domination led him to highlight

¹ This is probably not the place to discuss the reception of Bourdieu more generally. Suffice to say the US context has tended to read anything which is not as individualist as its more common theories of action in a structuralist vein, as done to Bourdieu, and as Rogers Brubaker (1985) bemoaned from early on and set out to rectify. In IR in particular, the discussion on Bourdieu's general approach shows his attempt to deny either structuralism and individualism (through the habitus) or materialism and idealism (Guzzini 2000, Leander 2008, 2010). Bourdieu's concept of capital, which encompasses many non-material ones, and of misrecognition, which sees domination in a relational manner (Guzzini 2013b), as well as his take on change and reflexivity (Leander 2002) have been used within a constructivist IR setting perfectly compatible with Adler's approach, and arguably necessary to it. Indeed, the very metaphor of 'stage', so important for Alexander's 'power in performance', has been thoroughly applied in a congenial and consistent reading of Bourdieu's theory of action (Leander 2011). For a related take on Bourdieu's analysis of power, see Bigo (2011).

how things are more than how they become (Adler 2019, 57). But it simply is not true that a theory of domination, be it Bourdieu's or others, can in principle not account for change nor rely on a process ontology in which the constitution of units is endogenised in the analysis. In fact, despite the usual reduction of such theories to mere reproduction, the whole idea of field theory also includes change, both from within the field and through transfers across fields (Bourdieu 1980, chapter 3). It is a theory of change without telos and without efficient causation – but so is Adler's. It also includes performativity in the stronger sense, in which our ideas of the world interact with it and the origins of the social positions, what Bourdieu calls the 'social magic' (e.g. Bourdieu 2001, 286ff.). Indeed, Bourdieu's repeated historicisation of structures, institutions, and agents' dispositions, as well as the disclosure of the ritualised mobilisations of bias ... all refer to 'becoming'. It is, however, the becoming that goes into being, and not the being that is part of a project of becoming. Put differently, when Adler stresses this difference with Bourdieu, it is less about processes of constitution, the becoming that made the present, as it were, but more about the becoming of the political future.

Hence, perhaps the issue is not about power in a social theory setting at all. Adler's repeated distancing from Bourdieu, despite the obvious similarities, may have to do with his underlying political theory, more particularly with the very definition of politics which has Arendtian undertones when Adler sees social order constituted by what actors 'do together, the quality of human interactions, and their social and normative achievements' (Adler 2019, 125. See also the explicit reference to Arendt's view on power on p. 74). As mentioned above, power has a central place in Western understandings of politics. Adler writes: 'Social orders are profoundly associated with politics. Politics is a constellation of practices through which agents govern societies; manage and resolve conflict, organise, guide and control interconnectedness and dissociation processes; and strive either to keep social orders metastable or to bring about their evolution' (Adler 2019, 21). This is again a fairly agential understanding of politics which is not self-evident from the process ontology espoused in the book. For if all is in the becoming, then this includes agents, as Adler (2019, 61, 73) also writes elsewhere but without carrying this insight to its conclusion. Making them the solid starting point of a vision of politics as a more or less intentional steering capacity through a constellation of practices is surely possible, but its agential focus is a choice and no necessity for a processual and relational ontology.

All this goes simply to underline why the book insists so heavily on these communities of practice. They are not just a set of agents with shared background knowledge. Whenever such communities of practice form, that very formation affects politics. In the overall theory, they are the central proxy for understanding the dynamics of history, since they are the agents of change. They are also a proxy for the state of politics and the polity, since their composition and background knowledge indicate the state and stage of evolution itself ('social order'), whether characterised by interconnectedness or disassociation, that is a world with communities that can link up to each other or not. Adler's communitarian assumption shows when he automatically links such interconnectedness with more informal forms of rule and 'epistemic practical authority' (see below) and

disassociation with vertical hierarchies that dominate politics (Adler 2019, 22). Communities of practice are best when they 'horizontalise' politics, when they hold world society together (Adler 2019, 191).

When all this is said and done, the analysis of these power travails ends with the diagnosis that the co-constitutive relation between communities of practice and social order narrows the role of power in the analysis of order; more precisely, it sidelines the role of domination in the establishment of such communities of practice and in their effects. If power is also outside communities of practice and vertically present (Adler 2019, 114), how does this outside relate to the inside? How can we neglect that it is the very positioning that is responsible for the ways such communities develop as sites and actors? The theory of action may be consistent with a theory of social order (Adler 2019, 117), but for a book that is about world ordering, these power processes that are outside the site and agency of communities of practice remain unreflected. When Adler claims that 'social orders are therefore what communities of practice have learned to become' (Adler 2019, 123), and when the latter are defined as both a site and horizontal collective agency, then the idea of order is substantially narrowed to its agential part, even if that is clearly socially embedded.

Sure, no concept of social order is truly comprehensive and hence the issue here is not that some conceptual choice has been made. Such choice is necessary. My aim was simply to use the analysis of power in its conceptual connection to 'politics' and to theories of domination and order to shed light on Adler's theory of *world ordering*. And here the finding is a certain mismatch. Neither the inspirations for his usage of the concept of power, nor Adler's ontology and social theory require the specific cut he proposes. It seems to be his theory of politics, in his agential take on governance, the role of collective and prospective agency (communities of practice), and the normative role of such communities, which lead him to this circumscribed vision of order. Put differently, whereas his social theory would rather prompt him to also think of horizontal relations of domination within and across fields, his take on evolutionary social change and his communitarian political theory led him to think power in the constitution of polities and the propensity for historical change. His theory of order provides only a part of the understanding of order that his own ontology and social theory would allow. By emphasising agency, the book cannot sufficiently reflect on the variety of more structural processes of domination (capitalism?) that contribute to constituting world order.

POWER IN THE EXPLANATION OF EVOLUTION

Power plays not only a role in the very understanding of practices and social order, but it is also used as an explanatory factor in the analysis. In this context, it has often been used as a form of cause. And just as the first section used power as a way to unpack his conceptualisation of order in cognitive evolution, the present section will use power to probe into the explanatory setup used in Adler's theory

of cognitive evolution. Here, Adler not only posits ontological links between his central concepts; he also wishes to use them for explanatory purposes.

Applying power to explanatory contexts can be a lure, as Peter Morriss argued several years ago. When conceived of in causal terms, power often ends up being used in a circular manner, since it is inferred from the effects it can no longer be used to explain. When framed in less demanding dispositional, not causal, terms, as Adler seems to do, power stands for an ability or capacity. But in either case, power statements '*summarise* explanations; they do not *explain* them' (Morriss 1987, 44, original emphasis). Originally targeting behaviouralist power analysis, Morriss' dictum is also applicable to other power analyses, however. Whereas in the previous section the ontological and political primacy given to communities of practice and the role of agency in evolution may have pushed him to downgrade aspects of domination in the analysis of power, here his ambition to combine a framework of analysis with an explanatory theory may have misconceived and overburdened power. Importantly, here we see epistemic practical authority as a causal variable.

One of the book's ambitions is explicitly explanatory. In a critique of Bhaskar and Archer's approach, Adler mentions their inability to 'explain how and why certain practices survive rather than others, and why social orders evolve.' Instead, his theory of 'social mechanisms and processes explain both the differential, albeit variable, replication of the practices of the communities of practice and of their background knowledge, their selective retention in space and time, as well as social order evolution' (all quotes from Adler 2019, 217). In a similar vein, 'assemblage theory' is very quickly dismissed for, among other things, missing an answer to 'why do assemblages acquire one form rather than another?', and, more generally, being 'hard to generalise, which makes it unsuitable for the social sciences, including post-positivist social science...' (all quotes from Adler 2019, 125).

In this explanatory endeavor, power plays a central role. It comes in the form of 'epistemic practical authority' which is nothing less than the 'master mechanism for understanding cognitive evolution, and particularly selective retention processes' (Adler 2019, 3). Epistemic practical authority is a composite concept made out of deontic and performative power. It is defined as 'the legitimate power to rule on the adoption of practices and their meanings' (Adler 2019, 4). More precisely, it is 'the capacity for practical meaning fixation or the structural and agential authoritative ascription of practical meaning to material and social reality to "stick," or to be authoritatively selected and retained' (Adler 2019, 236, see also p. 27). It is 'not located only in people's bodies and minds... [i]nstead, epistemic practical authority is intersubjectively located in communities of practice' (ibid., 236). As such it is closely connected to deontic power providing a potential whose realisation is contingent on being competently performed.² This competent

² This is quite close to Bourdieu's understanding of the field of politics organised around the monopoly of legitimate symbolic violence and its role in defining the 'vision and division of the world'. See e.g. Bourdieu (2001, 239).

performance is, as seen above, dependent on the audience to which it is directed and which is the origin of the legitimate claim to define practical meanings.

The continuous selective retention of practices and their background knowledge depends on whether a sufficiently large number of members of a community of practice continue to recognise and accept the shared meanings on which such practices rely (Searle 1995, 117) ... From this perspective, social order is not a goal pursued but an effect that occurs and field of practices that continually becomes (Adler 2019, 237).

In a nutshell: 'epistemic practical authority is the combined result of both types of social power and itself is a cause of practices' selection and social orders' evolution' (Adler 2019, 27).

How does epistemic practical authority exactly explain selection and evolution? The two are closely connected. It is the variance in the creation, and then selection and retention of communities of practices and their background knowledge which defines the (cognitive) evolution of social orders. Social orders are understood as 'fields, configurations, or "landscapes" of practices and communities of practice, whose *epistemic practical authority* assigns functions and status thus organising, stabilising, and managing social life' (Adler 2019, 21, 122, original emphasis, references omitted). Put differently, communities of practice and social order are co-constitutive and since epistemic practical authority is what keeps communities of practice together, any change in that authority affects communities and hence the order. Anything which explains the change of this authority explains, by implication, the evolution of social orders. Since epistemic practical authority is but the combination/sequence of deontic and performative power, any change in those social powers is ultimately a cause for social evolution, as e.g., when Adler writes that 'if deontic power diminishes ..., practices lose their epistemic practical authority and social order evolves: the configuration of practices that constitute it are replaced' (Adler 2019, 237). The change of epistemic practical authority can also be the effect of changing bearers of those powers, '[b]ecause new polities and organisations often mean new bases of epistemic practical authority' (Adler 2019, 190).

Hence, the causal path goes further back from epistemic practical authority to its constituents: what changes deontic and performative power? Well, many things can. Basically, any process which undermines the recognition and legitimacy of communities of practice, whether in their background knowledge or the competent enactment of practices, undermines *ipso facto* this power and hence affect epistemic practical authority, since one is defined or constituted by the other. Consequently, the evolution of epistemic practical authority social orders is ultimately indeterminate and contingent.

Whether social order's resilience or demise take place is indeterminate. The propensity for one or the other outcome will depend on context and on how particular situations processually unfold. ... the outcome will also largely depend on the differential purchase of epistemic practical authority. The latter, in turn, will depend on resourcefulness and innovation in creative

variation processes, as well as on learning, contestation and negotiation processes within, and deontic and performative power of, communities of practice in selective-retention processes, particularly when approaching intersubjective thresholds (Adler 2019, 189).

In this context Adler's remark makes sense that 'power refers not to a determinant "variable" but to processes and relations characterised by propensity and contingency' (Adler 2019, 23).

But how can we combine this idea of power in terms of a contingent and indeterminate process with the claims earlier mentioned in which epistemic practical authority is the master mechanism which causes nothing less than practices' selection, retention, and social orders' evolution? Something will have to give; and it is 'cause'. From his repeated distance to other post-positivist theories, as mentioned above, it is clear that Adler wishes to retain a stronger concept of cause to allow for generalisations. If so, then it makes little sense to use open-ended relational and process ontologies. If however he uses the latter, then cause is redefined in a way which makes his approach no different from the ones he criticises.

Put before this dilemma, I think the latter provides the more consistent path ahead. Adler's theory cannot really cut out its process ontology without losing its very foundation. Embarking on the other path, his take on causation will need to be amended – in a way already foreshadowed by his book. For the first alternative to work, the analysis of the causal paths needs factors independent of each other. Yet, besides the contingency of the processes, the relationship between the main concepts is constitutive, not causal. This applies to practices, background knowledge, and epistemic practical authority that constitute communities of practice, and then epistemic practical authority constituted by deontic power and performative power which, in turn, are constituted/enabled/empowered by the members of communities of practice. Hence, whereas Adler claims that the stretching out of the causal links in a process allows him to avoid circularity (Adler 2019, 189), this is in fact already achieved by the constitutive nature of his conceptual framework.

Shedding the generalisable and causal language does not mean that one sheds explanation and transferable knowledge, as Adler seemingly implies in his criticism of post-positivist theories. To the contrary, the latter offer ways forward in this regard. As a first step, the relationship between grand theory and actual explanation needs rethinking. Whereas Adler tries to combine the two, it makes more sense to distinguish between the abstract framework of analysis and a more empirical level at which explanations are handled. Rather than having general processual social mechanisms, as Adler proposes, the analysis would handle explanation at a significantly lower level of abstraction. Here, it can establish contingent causal paths, as done in process-tracing, and particular mechanisms within it. So has Ish-Shalom (2006) developed an approach to discourse-tracing, yet embedded in a Gramscian environment that endogenises material factors. He identifies hermeneutical mechanisms that he retraces in a process that translates

theoretical constructs into public conventions (understood as background knowledge) and finally political convictions (See also the congenial analysis of causal mechanisms in Jackson 2006, chapter 2). Whether called interpretivist process-tracing (Guzzini 2012a) or practice-tracing (Pouliot 2015), the idea is the same, namely to establish a causal path within an open process ontology on the basis of a previously abstracted framework of analysis. This path includes social mechanisms, established by observers, which are transferable to, yet significantly affected by, other contexts (Guzzini 2011, 2012b, Pouliot 2015).

In this reconstruction, Adler's theory is unpacked so that the relationship between empirics and theory is not thought in terms of generalisations which are then put to a test. Indeed, when the book ends with the invitation to develop 'case studies [that] will help test the arguments and the concepts I raised here, for example, deontic power, epistemic practical authority, common humanity, epistemological security, practical democracy, and many more' (Adler 2019, 301), it misconstrues the theoretical movement as one of empirical generalisation and general testing, when it is based on *abstraction and translation* (Guzzini 2013a). Theorising-as-abstraction happens when observers impose concepts that organise our way of distinguishing the significant from the insignificant in our analysis, as in Weber's ideal types (for a recent assessment of Weber's ideal types, see Jackson 2017). Theorising-as-translation happens when mechanisms or other patterns are moved, and thereby adapted, from one context to another (for an argument defending the combination of the two as 'logical generality', see Jackson 2011, 153, 99). Both make knowledge transferable; indeed, in a hermeneutic circle, they make knowledge possible in the first place.

Consequently, epistemic practical authority cannot be a master mechanism for explaining evolution if this is to retain any classical causal meaning. It is pitched at the wrong (because too high) level of theoretical abstraction for explanation when couched in an open process ontology. When Adler puts one central power claim as

The more a claim in the name of a valuable practice, which is grounded on collective intentionality, is endowed with deontic and performative power, thus with epistemic practical authority, the more the propensity for the horizontal spread of practices and background knowledge to take place (Adler 2019, 244, original emphasis)

it looks like a causal, if probabilistic claim; yet it cannot deliver on these terms. Since deontic and performative power is constituted by its acceptance within communities of practice, and since the processes of this acceptance are contingent and open, as Adler shows at other places (cited above), all the sentence can say, avoiding tautology, is that it makes sense to abstractly understand the role of power in social evolution in this way. Power does not explain here, but it stands in for explanations which, contingent and contextual, will have to be found on another level and in another manner.

CONCLUSION

World Ordering is a synthesis and development of Adler's thought, with the aim to make constructivist macro-level analyses of order more dynamic. The book clearly avoids any functionalist or teleological trap often connected to evolutionary theories by placing the theory on a processual and relational ontology. It centrally conceptualises change but in an open manner. This does not exclude, but instead logically includes, a normative analysis of the most valued type of cognitive evolution or social learning constituting the preferred social order. However, although the cognitive interest in such normative aim is clear, it does not provide a necessary endpoint of the analysis of evolution.

The present chapter used his analysis of power to unpack his political and explanatory theory. It claims, that by making the theory more dynamic, Adler tends to accentuate the agentic components of power – and hence order – that are the communities of practice, their deontic and performative power and their propensity to affect future change. This choice was informed more by his communitarian political theory than by his social theory. Moreover, tying his conceptual framework to an explanatory theory, the concept of epistemic practical authority, based on deontic and performative power, becomes crucial as cause for understanding the evolution of social orders, while assuming evolution to be constituted by contingent and contextual processes that stay indeterminate. In short, the chapter argues that when it comes to the analysis of power, Adler's political theory downgrades the role of domination in social order, whereas the explanatory ambition overburdens epistemic practical authority as cause.

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