

Freedom, agency and power

The paper will discuss power - the capacity to produce outcomes - and the various ways power has been appealed to in order to characterise human action. Power is involved in self-determination - our capacity to determine for ourselves what we do - and also in the motivation of action. But the involvement of power in self-determination and motivation may be very different. A feature of much modern English-language action theory has been to appeal to ordinary causal power attaching to psychological states and events to explain both motivation and self-determination. But past action theory has often taken a very different form, appealing to other kinds of power, and sharply distinguishing the powers involved in motivation and self-determination. The key figure in the development of modern action theory is Thomas Hobbes, who used scepticism about the possibility of power other than ordinary causation to transform not only action theory but moral and political theory also.