

# A Multi-Party Imaginary Dialogue about Power and Cybernetics

Phillip Guddemi<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** This paper is written as a multi-sided dialogue intended to present a number of ideas about power. Some of these ideas are my own, expressed in a kind of evolutionary idiom of adaptation though they were partly developed in reaction to Foucault (and are far more indebted to Foucault and cybernetics than to contemporary evolutionist thinking). There is a deep irony in that my way of thinking is primarily rooted in the cybernetic anthropology of Gregory Bateson; however, he was deeply skeptical of the concept of power. My personification of him in this dialogue, as “Bateson,” demonstrates this skepticism and brings into the discussion other relevant ideas of his. The third participant in the dialogue, Mary Midgley, is included because her consideration of Hobbes’ ideas leads us to consider yet another, probabilistic, way of thinking about power.

**Keywords:** Adaptation, epistemology, power

*The following is a multi-sided dialogue<sup>2</sup> imagined as being between various persons who have been and remain influential within my own evolving thought about power. My ideas have roots in the cybernetic anthropology of Gregory Bateson; however, he was deeply skeptical of the concept of power. My personification of him in this dialogue, as “Bateson,” demonstrates this skepticism and brings into the discussion other relevant ideas of his. In counterpoint to his views (which can be documented as his or as having been prefigured by his), my own persona in this dialogue articulates evolving aspects of my own thought which relate to concepts of competition, status, and risk. The only other participant is Mary Midgley who brings into the discussion her unique perspective on the political thought of Hobbes.*

**Bateson:** Not everyone feels that the concept of “power” needs re-examination. Most people, perhaps, are fairly satisfied with it, and not merely in the “political” sphere. I got very discontented with the way certain people were using the concept of power in the family therapy business. For example Jay Haley, the family therapist who was a coauthor with me of a paper about schizophrenia, used to postulate that every participant in a family system was engaged in a struggle for “power.”<sup>3</sup> And the entire movement which calls itself “neuro-linguistic

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<sup>1</sup> Phillip Guddemi was an undergraduate student of Gregory Bateson’s at the University of California, Santa Cruz in the middle 1970s. He has published a number of peer reviewed articles dealing with Gregory Bateson’s work. He is also an anthropologist who has worked in Papua New Guinea and Macedonia; and he is currently Vice President for Membership at the American Society for Cybernetics, as well as being Managing Editor of the journal, *Cybernetics and Human Knowing*. Email: pguddemi@well.com.

<sup>2</sup> *Editor’s note:* In formatting this essay, we employed a hybrid of the journal’s traditional use of APA style and footnoted citations to accommodate the nature of the material.

<sup>3</sup> The disagreement between the two collaborators is discussed from Haley’s point of view in Haley (1979).



programming” seems to be based on ideas of power and control. I stopped sending people to study Milton Erickson’s techniques of hypnosis after finding out that they so often seemed to come back “craving for power.”<sup>4</sup>

It’s ironic that Norbert Weiner called cybernetics the study of *control* and communication.<sup>5</sup> Because if cybernetics teaches anything, it is that our control, over what we like to call our “environment,” is radically limited. Each of us is only *part* of whatever system it is we are participating in.

There is a certain scientific *hubris* about control which I reacted against. It goes with ideas of linear cause. We find the cause and we can obtain the effect, assuming that the effect is something that we want. Effects we don’t want we call “side effects” or “unintended consequences,” and then we work on minimizing those. But they are precisely what we don’t want to think about, so we don’t, until we have to. Therefore we are always running faster and faster to mitigate the effects of our previous interventions. The world is always falsifying our simplified versions of it, but we simplify because it is the only way to “get things done.”

So what we think of as our control over the world, and over others, is always limited. But over and above that, “power” has problems as an explanatory principle. I had always warned against “power” as well as “energy” as being quantitative metaphors about qualitative things, not applicable to the world I call “creatura,” the world of biology and communication that operates on cybernetic principles rather than according to billiard-ball physics. And of course power has a meaning in that world, as does energy—and in our veneration of physics, which comes from our success (or apparent success) in controlling our physical world, we naturally apply ideas from physics to living systems in ways that don’t make sense. With energy, for example, we have psychic energy, which to me is a false metaphor for that reason. Similarly we have Freud’s hydraulic system of the self—maybe that’s been largely forgotten these days, good riddance, though there was a lot else in Freud that’s been thrown out with the bathwater...

There is another point about power, which is that you are always yourself autonomous, or as Maturana and Varela put it, autopoietic. Or as I often put it, your energy comes from your own breakfast. If you kick a ball, the energy of the ball is transferred from your foot to the ball, but if you kick a dog, the dog just might bite you back, because the dog has its own source of energy, which we call its metabolism. It is autonomous in that sense.<sup>6</sup> Foucault, who has been cited in the service of a lot of nonsense using the word power, actually said that power is always a relation between beings (people, but I think his analysis works for animals too) who are mutually autonomous in this way. He calls it “action upon the action of others,”<sup>7</sup> but what this means is that you as the less powerful one are still responsible for your own actions, and the more powerful people are there in your environment and you are making choices about how to deal with them. But see, the opposite is true too—you are in their environment, and they are making choices as to how to deal with you. There is no unilineal power.

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<sup>4</sup> Bateson’s criticism of students he sent to see Milton Erickson can be found in an unpublished interview with Bradford Keeney, quoted and cited (pp. 224-225) in Erickson, Takeuchi, and Gilligan (2002).

<sup>5</sup> Weiner (1948/1961)

<sup>6</sup> See Bateson (1979, pp. 112-113).

<sup>7</sup> Foucault (1982, p. 428).

Near the end of my life, I set a challenge to cybernetic thinkers of the future. I did this in a little-known conference devoted to what it means to be a “power broker.” It was a conference about an urban planner in New York named Robert Moses, but really, my thoughts were not specific to him. I challenged that conference to “try to spell out in terms of patterns of interaction in real time what the metaphor ‘power’ really denotes – a re-examination of the basic premises of political science in the light of cybernetics.”<sup>8</sup>

**Phillip:** So let me try to take up this challenge, as I have done in a 2004 conference in Copenhagen,<sup>9</sup> in an article for *Cybernetics and Human Knowing*,<sup>10</sup> and in a recent presentation for the systems theorists on Foucault.<sup>11</sup>

Put in an evolutionary frame, the key idea I want to develop is very simple. All organisms live in and adapt to an environment. For social animals, among the most important constituents of that environment are other animals of the same species. Power, or if you like, social power, comes from this simple picture. We say that A has power over B if B is adapting to A more than A is adapting to B. Really I don’t know why this formulation has not come about sooner.

I suspect the reason it hasn’t is that conventional theories of power seem to look at it from the agency of the power-wielder. Power is seen as some faculty or property or quality inherent in an agent, which enables that agent to *do* things. And indeed what we call power-to can be seen as something which is the *capacity* of an agent. However, I find that power-over, or social power, can more fruitfully be seen from the point of view of the adapting person (or organism), the one who is “underneath.” This transformation is similar to that in reader-response theories of authorship, and it can be shown to be inherent in second-order cybernetics and in constructivism.

It turns out that power, which is a heterogeneous thing when it is looked at from the perspective of “what sorts of things make the powerful powerful,” finds a kind of conceptual unity if it is seen instead as that to which the less powerful *adapt*. This adaptation can be unconscious or automatic or it can be quite conscious and strategic. Adaptation in this kind always is done by an *autonomous* agent of the type which Bateson talked about, and indeed Foucault made a similar point.<sup>12</sup> And since we are always adapting to each other, we are by this definition or conception also always exerting power over each other—a concept which fits well with a kind of Foucaultian capillary concept of power. But clearly some people exert more power over others than others do, and we can see this as similar to gravity. Gravity is a force exerted by

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<sup>8</sup> Bateson (1974, p. 26)

<sup>9</sup> Copenhagen Bateson Symposium 2005, sponsored by the University of Copenhagen’s Priority Area for Religion in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

<sup>10</sup> Guddemi (2006)

<sup>11</sup> Guddemi (2008)

<sup>12</sup> Foucault’s point:

Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free. By this we mean individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse comportments, may be realized. Where the determining factors saturate the whole, there is no relationship of power; slavery is not a power relationship when man is in chains. (In this case it is a question of a physical relationship of constraint.). (Foucault 1982, p. 428)

all matter on all other matter, but depending on the mass of the objects, the gravitational pull of A on B may far exceed the gravitational pull of B on A. So why not the same for power? The power of A over B exists to the extent that B's adaptation to A is more than A's adaptation to B.

**Bateson:** But what is this “more than”? Such a concept of power imposes a quantitative metric on phenomena that are not always quantitative. Ever since the triumph of quantitative science we have lost the knack of looking at patterns.

Power in this sense is a human construction rather like money. These are unbiological ideas, and they distort our experience as biological organisms. In the world of biology it is not true that more is better. It is a world of optimizing not maximizing. You have to have just the right amount of hormone in the right place in the developing body, not too little, not too much. The same with other quantitative things—as I wrote, protein, oxygen, sex, warmth, entertainment, water, air<sup>13</sup>—maybe even money. Or “power.”

But money is something of which we assume that the more we have of it the better off we are. And we make the same assumption about power. These are cultural assumptions and they are among the precise ones which are helping us destroy the planet.

Here is another example of a related construction, which we have now imposed on the helpless brute animals: “dominance.” We have this whole idea that social mammals impose on each other a rank order such as our own societies have had. But this is now being challenged by some of the primatologists themselves. Bruno Latour has mentioned in his work<sup>14</sup> the baboon studies of Shirley Strum, who demonstrated a new way of looking at baboons, male baboons no less. She simply denies that they have a dominance hierarchy, certainly not one based on aggression.<sup>15</sup> Instead, like us baboons use social skill, reciprocity, and cooperation, though aggression is part of the mix as well. And no one should be surprised at this, but we are. Because we have a protocol to place baboons in a “dominance” rank order, and because this protocol works for us (in ways which provide a kind of self-confirmation), we assume that the protocol describes what the baboons are doing, but Shirley Strum says no.<sup>16</sup>

**Mary Midgley:** I believe our culture's concept of power can be seen in Hobbes, the 17<sup>th</sup> Century political thinker. “So that in the first place, I put for a general inclination of all Mankind, a perpetual and restless desire for power after power, that ceaseth only in Death. And the cause of this is not always that a man hopes for a more intensive delight than he has already attained to: or that he cannot be content with a moderate power: but because he cannot assure the power and means to live well, which he hath present, without the acquisition of more (Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Pt. 1, Ch. 11).”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Bateson (1974, p. 27)

<sup>14</sup> Latour (2005, p. 69)

<sup>15</sup> Strum (1987, p. 157) cited in Latour, above.

<sup>16</sup> Strum's skepticism about dominance order in primates was prefigured, in my opinion, by Bateson's skepticism about transitive order in biological systems generally. With respect to human power relations he reiterated this skepticism in his 1974 draft paper, *op cit.*, pp. 26-27.

<sup>17</sup> Midgley (1978, p. 8)

Marshall Sahlins has recently argued that this is “the Western illusion of human nature.” And he makes a good case that it is a longstanding folk belief going back to Thucydides and even earlier, that we are innately competitive and avaricious. He doesn’t see other cultures as having made this assumption, or having come to this conclusion.<sup>18</sup>

But I am interested in the Hobbes quote because of the way he shows power to be an insurance.<sup>19</sup> In our societies we amass money and power because we want them to buffer things that might happen to us later. This is how the desire for money and power becomes boundless.

We can distinguish the desire for enough, from the desire always to be certain of having enough. Recent work on happiness shows that it increases along with income up to a certain point, and then after that point there is far less correlation between income and reported happiness.<sup>20</sup> We can think of that point as the “enough” point of any particular society. Hunter-gatherers, as another example, when they supplement their subsistence style with working for pay, will often work just as much as necessary to get what they want, and then they will stop, with little to induce them back to work. It takes a social transformation for them to feel that they need more.<sup>21</sup>

But this is exactly what Hobbes is saying with respect to power. The desire for power, like that for money, doesn’t come from wanting more happiness or fulfillment in the present. A limited amount of money, or power, would suffice for these, and Hobbes as much as admits that. The desire for more, whether this is money or power, comes from fear or anxiety about possible loss. If one could always insure against everything that might happen, one could maybe relax in the present. However, there is always some other unlikely event that could happen. We accumulate and accumulate, both money and what we perceive as “power,” in hopes that we can thereby defend against all the possibilities that might threaten us, and yet each further accumulation comes with its own associated vulnerability, so that we are always in fear and never truly enjoy what it is we have accumulated.

**Phillip:** This insurance concept could provide us with a possible metric for power, although I don’t think this has been done. Power could be measured as a derivative expression based in probability, just as we find in *insurance* itself. Life is full of uncertainties but each of these uncertainties has a particular probability. If I can decrease the probability of something I don’t want happening to me, I will do that. I can decrease my risk. But in a social world I can often do that by increasing yours. It is not *always* as zero-sum as that, but it *can* be.

Robert Sapolsky has studied status hierarchies among baboons<sup>22</sup> and Michael Marmot has studied them among human beings.<sup>23</sup> Even granting what Shirley Strum has to say about the self-confirming aspects of dominance theory, there is still a difference in the very bloodstreams of baboons who occupy different social places, whether you prefer to call these effects of

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<sup>18</sup> Sahlins (2008)

<sup>19</sup> Midgley (1978)

<sup>20</sup> Layard (2005)

<sup>21</sup> Bird-David, Nurit (1992)

<sup>22</sup> Sapolsky (2004)

<sup>23</sup> Marmot (2004)

dominance or not. Status in your group counts; the lives of those lower in status are more chaotic than that of those higher up. This can be the doing of the higher-ups themselves, for example if they bully the lower-downs. “Stress” is less at the top and more at the bottom, precisely because those at the top experience fewer perturbations and fewer risks.

So a possible metric of power could be about comparative insulation from risk. However, as Ulrich Beck shows in his work on the risk society, this is not always easy to ensure in our changing society, in which previously unknown risks emerge all the time.

Still, if you look at those at the bottom of social hierarchies, you will see that *in general* they undergo more risks with less buffering, they have to adapt to more, and they have fewer resources with which to do this.

**Bateson:** “Stress” is another of those physical metaphors for biological realities. In *Mind and Nature* I define it as follows: “Lack of entropy, a condition arising when the external environment or internal sickness makes excessive or contradictory demands on an organism’s ability to adjust. The organism lacks and needs *flexibility*, having used up its available uncommitted alternatives.”<sup>24</sup>

Stress is the result of double binds, and for me double binds are the result of adaptation which is challenged. You are perfectly adapted to one thing and another thing comes along which makes your earlier adapted behavior “wrong.”<sup>25</sup> Over time if you are stably adapted to one thing, because it is always there in your particular environment, then you will tend to hard-wire your response to it. As with practicing the piano, or any skill, eventually your knowledge proceeds to more and more unconscious levels of the mind. But when something that deeply learned starts to be “punished” in some way, due to some changes in your relationship to others, for example other people, then you will experience, at minimum, psychological pain.

**Phillip:** And it seems that people above others in hierarchies are able to keep those below in just that kind of uncertainty. This is part of the “risk society” which is a phrase that comes from Ulrich Beck.<sup>26</sup> The higher-ups experience a certain buffering of the demands of the environment, while the lower-downs have to adapt not only to the ambient environment but also to the activities of the higher-ups. Risk is transferred to those least able to bear it, and power is the mechanism for how this is done. Maturana and Varela refer to the “perturbations” of the environment<sup>27</sup>, but people make their own perturbations for each other, which they experience as “stress.” Power is the measure and mechanism for how some experience more stress than they cause, and others cause more stress than they experience.

**Bateson:** No, this makes power into a dormitive principle.<sup>28</sup> If you want to say power is *itself* this transference of risk, or stress, that is one thing; but you are making just pretty phrases if you

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<sup>24</sup>Bateson (1979, p. 253)

<sup>25</sup> The discussion of double bind here is an extension of the argument in the following: Bateson, G. (1978), *The Birth of a Matrix, or Double Bind and Epistemology*. In Bateson (1991, pp. 191-214).

<sup>26</sup>Beck (1992)

<sup>27</sup> Maturana and Varela (1992)

<sup>28</sup> For “dormitive principle” or rather “dormitive explanation,” see Bateson (1979, p. 95).

call it a mechanism. You are adding a black box you don't need. Say instead that bullying is the mechanism, or rational persuasion (in the sense of how a robber with a gun rationally persuades you to give him your money).

Also I think that the double bind is not restricted to people who have to cope with a stressful environment, even if it is other people who do so much to make it stressful. In fact I think that the classic double bind that I described in relation to schizophrenia, is more especially experienced by people whose environment has changed from a stability it used to have, to a new situation in which their old adaptations are maladaptive. In the evolutionary context this is the prelude to extinction. But those who endure in their lives a relatively stable exploitation full of suffering may not be experiencing so many double binds, in spite of a miserable existence.

**Phillip:** Maybe the lower-downs experience a loss of possible efficiency in their adaptation, incurring a kind of cost to their bodies and even their minds from having to deal with perturbations outside their control. But they may get a kind of flexibility from this, in that they have less to lose when big changes happen. This seems to relate to what these days is fashionable to call privilege.<sup>29</sup> You have privilege when you have such a good adaptation to the way things are that you don't have to think about it, which in Bateson's terms means you can "hard-wire" it, while others have to be more conscious about factors in their environment which you can rely on more than they can. But this relative privilege is also the prelude to a classic double bind for the privileged, when the underlying environment shifts. They are more adapted to stable situations but less so to changes.

In human terms this looks like a kind of comeuppance for people who have been living it up like feudal lords, or Wall Street. But in ecological terms this analogous dynamic is more obviously sad. The animals and plants of the tropical rainforests have had a stable environment for millions of years in which to develop very special adaptations which could only have emerged due to that relative stability. The perturbations we humans introduce as we destroy these tropical rainforests challenge the "privilege" of these specialized organisms, while our activities "reward" organisms which can adapt to a variety of changing ecosystems, such as rodents, weeds, and cockroaches.

In evolutionary biology there is the concept of fitness. But fitness measures adaptation against some theoretical optimum with respect to an environment—as if the environment itself was not changing. Of course environments do change, and most especially when they are composed of one's fellow humans.

**Bateson:** I can see a problem with your use of hierarchies as a metric for power though. What about a newborn baby? The moment that baby comes into a family, the parents have to adapt to that new baby—their whole world changes. Freud used to refer to "His Majesty the Baby."

So the point I want to make is again, against this whole idea of a metric for power. Is there a metric that will capture both the power of the parents to determine the basic environment for the baby, and also the power of the baby totally to transform the lives of these same parents?

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<sup>29</sup> In a talk before the American Society for Cybernetics conference at Urbana, Illinois, in 2007, entitled "Do Power and Privilege without Responsibility Make You Stupid?"

And it is not so different for politicians. They have to adapt to what the people want, to a great extent. For example, Goebbels, in Nazi Germany...<sup>30</sup>

**Phillip:** I'm going to interrupt you here. I'm not sure I like that example so well. But it's true that the "adaptive landscape" of any leader is composed of that leader's followers. Some followers are more equal than others in this respect, such as lobbyists for powerful businesses. But no leader can lead without followers, and leaders who try to articulate a personal vision beyond what their people are ready for, can get into trouble.

I am willing to say that the people have power against the rulers. But here is the thing. Even among animals, an alpha needs subordinates to be an alpha—but an alpha may disregard a *particular* subordinate more than that subordinate can disregard its *particular* alpha.

**Bateson:** But what I was getting at was the idea that there are indeed *types* of power. In my presentation for the conference on "Broken Power" I used the metaphor of the parts of a play. Or, as a similarly dramaturgical example, the courtroom. The judge has one type of power, the jury another, the attorneys yet another, and the security guard for the court building, yet another. Like an ecological system, composed of relations between predators and prey, each of which has an evolving and changing role, and each of which continually adapts to the other.

I said there that "Perhaps the nearest 'reality' to the metaphoric myth of 'power' is a large or important part in an ecosystem."<sup>31</sup> An ecosystem is a whole in which no individual organism, or even species, has control over that whole. Particular plants and animals demonstrate themselves as being important within the larger system – but they are not determining the operations of that system in a linear way. Similarly, the powerful in society are not, after all, independent variables which determine the less powerful, in the way that independent variables in science are analyzed to determine dependent variables.

It's true we like to think of our power that way, for example for parents vis-à-vis the children who dominate their lives. This is the idea of the "blank slate," you know. By the way it's a total nonsense to assume that I, or Margaret Mead, or any of those people, thought that power worked that way. It wasn't anthropologists in our day who thought that cultural change was easy, that you could just impose it as a blank slate on people.<sup>32</sup> That was the dream of control in our generation, but you saw it more in psychology, like B.F. Skinner. If you look at my work you find it was always against putting people (or even animals) in Skinner boxes.

You came to me years ago with some idea of making your own major in college—you could do that then, at U.C. Santa Cruz. You wanted to write a major in "cultural planning." Anyway, I told you that you should definitely do that, you know. You should work at trying to figure how to plan culture. But in the end, I told you, you would look at the whole thing and come out with a belly laugh. The belly laugh would come to you because you would eventually realize that cultural planning is impossible. Because, as I told you, "you can't deal with love in that way."

<sup>30</sup> Bateson argued famously that even Goebbels, charged with the manipulation of public opinion in Nazi Germany, had to tailor his message to the German people. See Bateson (1972, p. 486).

<sup>31</sup>See Bateson (1974, p. 27).

<sup>32</sup>See Guddemi (2005).

To speak of “love” in any way is somewhat taboo in academia, and I used to relish the shock value in using the term. When I refer to love it is not merely to speak of an emotion, although emotion is certainly part of it. I wanted to counter the idea that cultural change is easy. Our most intimate ways of dealing with each other and our relationships are culturally patterned and punctuated. Changing these is very difficult and facile shortcuts to cultural change, such as those which try to leverage the use of force, are not usually effective. And of course in addition to their ineffectiveness they can hurt people in ways not intended or planned.

Maturana has now taken up the matter of love, and he sees it both as a feeling and as a behavioral foundation for the cooperation that is typical of the human species.<sup>33</sup> As a principle, he sees love as interacting with another as a legitimate other in relationship, as opposed to dominance and power which do not legitimate the other. He contrasts the human care for infants and friendly cooperativeness with the chimpanzee, which he finds to be more “political” than humans in emphasizing dominance and power. Perhaps like the hippies of the 1960s, Maturana seems to see love in this sense as *natural* to human beings.

**Phillip:** But wouldn't it be true that human beings have at all times been both loving *and* political? Maturana makes an opposition between *Homo sapiens amans* and *Homo sapiens aggressans* but I suspect we have always been both, just as chimpanzees are both, but I think he is right that love is a bigger part of our mix than it is for the chimpanzees. Also I should mention that in some relational views of “power” it is still a factor even in loving relationships, and this accords with most contemporary thought including feminist thought.

A group of cooperative humans, for all that cooperation is based on trust and what Maturana calls love, may have an advantage in fighting another hostile group of humans which has not developed so much cooperation. There you might have love in the service of aggression. Indeed armies cannot fight without the *esprit de corps* which is the fellow feeling, the relational morale, of the soldiers in the armies. The ideology is that it is the hierarchy which creates the effectiveness of armies, but “love” indeed does its part.

On the other hand, when you do have the social breakdown situation that Hobbes describes—and no, I don't believe it is the “state of nature,” but it does happen—when you have people split into small groups fighting for supremacy, we tend to believe that it can promote “love”—or at least peace—when one of them decisively wins. That was the idea of the *Pax romanum*, the Roman empire which established such a complete supremacy that, in the provinces, if you decided you didn't care about your sovereignty or rights anymore, you could turn your attention to peaceful pursuits, to the arts of trade for example. (And if you look at trade, you will find both the love and the war within that too.) You could turn your attention away from the question of who wins, admit that the Romans did, and do a few things that didn't involve worrying so intensely about who was on top. (And of course this is exactly what Hobbes advocated.)

I don't recommend this idea to today's would-be imperialists however—even those who want to impose “democracy” (promote love by means of war, which is what doesn't work). What is now called asymmetrical warfare means that small groups can disrupt big societies, and

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<sup>33</sup> Maturana, Verden-Zoller, and Bunnell (2008)

something like the *Pax Romanum* is no longer possible, because the little dogs no longer admit defeat and they can always disrupt what the big dogs want to do.

The idea I am putting forth, to look at who is adapting to whom, represents, I suspect, a departure from a traditional concept of power. It does not arise from the figure of the dominant patriarch or alpha who, as we like to think, has desires and uses his agency to fulfill them. I suspect this figure is the origin of our imaginary—our mental picture we see when we use the word power. Blake called him Nobodaddy—nobody’s daddy, whom we imagine as everybody’s. A figure to be envied, or not. A pinnacle of a status hierarchy.

Things have gotten too serious to have such a frivolous image of the landscape of power in which we live. To have before us on our minds above all else the question of who gets what, in the short run at least. (Though it is frightening to look at any English dictionary and note the pages and pages which have to be devoted to the verb “to get.”) Nor am I trying to argue this on behalf of the temporary kings of the mountain, who will hold that position briefly enough in terms of the time scales we as humans are now in a position to affect.

Power is not a possession, but a summary term of a complex relational configuration of events subject to continual change. We need to recognize that we are mutually embedded in and with each other, involved in webs of circular cause. All of us unavoidably adapt to each other all the time, creating by our mutual adjustments a sort of shifting landscape of mutual influence or power, in which unilateral control is impossible. However, wise action may be possible, and perhaps new metaphors of power can help.

**Bateson:** In my position paper for the “Broken Power” conference, I mentioned a number of partial meanings of the “power” metaphor, a number of phenomena which “power” is invoked to explain. One of these was “scope, in either time or space.” We would hope that enlarging the scope of our understanding would empower us. Indeed, I noted that “‘power,’ when scope is large, begins to approximate ‘wisdom.’ But wisdom crieth out in the house tops and no man regardeth?”<sup>34</sup>

*I hope that a re-examination of the premises of the concept of power, can bring forth wisdom. In spite of the tendency of wisdom to be disregarded even when it cries out in the streets, perhaps in these times we are searching it out.*

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<sup>34</sup> Bateson (1974, p. 27). He is quoting a common 19<sup>th</sup> Century abridgement of Proverbs

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