

Rationality and Power

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Democratic contrivances are quarantine measures against that ancient plague, the lust for power: as such, they are very necessary and very boring. *Friedrich Nietzsche*

Aalborg as Metaphor

The Aalborg Project may be interpreted as a metaphor of modern politics, modern administration and planning, and of modernity itself. The basic idea of the project was comprehensive, coherent, and innovative, and it was based on rational and democratic argument. During implementation, however, when idea met reality, the play of Machiavellian princes, Nietzschean will to power, and Foucauldian rationality-as-rationalization resulted in the fragmentation of the project. It disintegrated into a large number of disjointed subprojects, many of which had unintended, unanticipated, and undemocratic consequences. The grand, unifying, and prize-winning policy and plan degenerated into [a] string of petty incidents. . . . Planners, administrators, and politicians thought that if they believed in their project hard enough, rationality would emerge victorious; they were wrong. The Aalborg Project, designed to substantially restructure and democratically improve the downtown environment, was transformed by power and *Realrationalität* into environmental degradation and social distortion. Institutions that were supposed to represent what they themselves call the “public interest” were revealed to be deeply embedded in the hidden exercise of power and the protection of special interests. This is the story of modernity and democracy in practice, a story repeated all too often for comfort for a democrat. The problems with the Aalborg Project do not derive from Aalborg being especially plagued by corrupt policies or incompetent planning and administration.

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Most people interested in politics know one or more “Aalborg Stories,” and the policy studies literature is replete with examples of failed policies, confused administration, and unbalanced planning. “You don’t get to comfort yourself very long with the thought that they aren’t too smart in Aalborg,” observed one commentator on previously published results from the Aalborg study. “The description of what went wrong and why contains many elements familiar to anyone who works with planning in practice.”¹ At a more general level, the Aalborg case confirms Charles Taylor’s observation that central tenets of the Enlightenment legacy can be maintained primarily as goals and hope but not as reality.²

One such tenet is Francis Bacon’s famous “Knowledge is power.” Bacon’s statement encapsulates one of the most fundamental ideas of modernity and of the Enlightenment: the more rationality, the better. Our study of the Aalborg Project certainly demonstrates the relevance of Bacon’s statement. Yet it also shows that power and knowledge cannot be separated from each other in the way Bacon does; and even if one were to speak in Bacon’s terms, the Aalborg study shows that the relationship between knowledge and power is commutative: not only is knowledge power, but, more important, power is knowledge. Power determines what counts as knowledge, what kind of interpretation attains authority as the dominant interpretation. Power procures the knowledge which supports its purposes, while it ignores or suppresses that knowledge which does not serve it. Moreover, the *relations* between knowledge and power are decisive if one seeks to understand the kinds of processes affecting the dynamics of politics, administration, and planning. There is a long tradition from Thucydides over Machiavelli and Nietzsche to Foucault for providing such an understanding. The case study of Aalborg was carried out in this tradition, and in our conclusions we will remain within it. Thus, the principal question to be addressed [here] is, “What basic relations of rationality and power have shaped the Aalborg Project and have led to its lack of balance, fragmentation, and lack of goal achievement?”³

This question will be elucidated by summarizing ten propositions about rationality and power. . . . [W]e will use the ten propositions to construct a “grounded theory,” understood as theory inductively founded upon concrete phenomenology. While the propositions obviously derive from the case of Aalborg, and thus cannot be seen as general theory, they can serve as useful guidelines for researching rationality and power in other settings. The ten propositions may also serve as a phenomenology for testing, refining, and further developing the classical statements about power, knowledge, and rationality found in Bacon, Machiavelli, Kant, Nietzsche, and more recently in Michel Foucault, Jürgen Habermas, Richard Rorty, and others.

The order of presentation of the ten propositions will begin with a focus on the rationality of power and gradually move toward describing the power of rationality.

PROPOSITION 1: *Power defines reality*

Power concerns itself with defining reality rather than with discovering what reality “really” is. This is the single most important characteristic of the rationality of power, that is, of the strategies and tactics employed by power in relation to rationality. Defining reality by defining rationality is a principal means by which power exerts itself. This is not to imply that power seeks out rationality and knowledge *because* rationality and knowledge are power. Rather, power *defines* what counts as rationality and knowledge and thereby what counts as reality. The

evidence of the Aalborg case confirms a basic Nietzschean insight: interpretation is not only commentary, as is often the view in academic settings, “interpretation is itself a means of becoming master of something” – in this case master of the Aalborg Project – and “all subduing and becoming master involves a fresh interpretation.”⁴ Power does not limit itself, however, to simply defining a given interpretation or view of reality, nor does power entail only the power to render a given reality authoritative. Rather, power defines, and creates, concrete physical, economic, ecological, and social realities.

PROPOSITION 2: Rationality is context-dependent, the context of rationality is power, and power blurs the dividing line between rationality and rationalization

Philosophy and science often present rationality as independent of context; for example, in universal philosophical, ethical, or scientific imperatives, a current example being the “theory of communicative rationality” and “discourse ethics” of Habermas. If these imperatives are followed, the result is supposed to be rational and generally acceptable actions. Our study of politics, administration, and planning in Aalborg shows rationality to be a discourse of power. Rationality is context-dependent, the context often being power. Rationality is penetrated by power, and it becomes meaningless, or misleading – for politicians, administrators, and researchers alike – to operate with a concept of rationality in which power is absent. This holds true for substantive as well as communicative rationality. Communication is more typically characterized by nonrational rhetoric and maintenance of interests than by freedom from domination and consensus seeking. In rhetoric, the “validity” and effect of communication is established via the mode of communication – for example, eloquence, hidden control, rationalization, charisma, using dependency relations between participants – rather than through rational arguments concerning the matter at hand. Seen from this perspective, Habermas cuts himself off from understanding real communication when, in developing his theory of communicative rationality and discourse ethics, he distinguishes between “successful” and “distorted” utterances in human conversation; success in rhetoric that is not based on rational argument is associated precisely with distortion, a phenomenon demonstrated repeatedly in the Aalborg study.⁵ The assertion of Harold Garfinkel and other ethnomethodologists that the rationality of a given activity is produced “in action” by participants via that activity is supported by the Aalborg case. In addition, we have seen that whenever powerful participants require rationalization and not rationality, such rationalization is produced. Rationalization is a pervasive feature of the Aalborg Project and is practiced by all key actors.

PROPOSITION 3: Rationalization presented as rationality is a principal strategy in the exercise of power

In the same way that political science, following Machiavelli and Ludwig von Rochau, distinguishes between formal politics and *Realpolitik*, evidence from the Aalborg study indicates the need for the study of politics, administration, planning, and modernity, to distinguish between formal rationality and *Realrationalität*, real rationality. The freedom to interpret and use “rationality” and “rationalization” for the purposes of power is a crucial element in enabling power to define reality and, hence, an essential feature of the rationality of power.

The relationship between rationality and rationalization is often what Erving Goffman calls a “front-back” relationship. “Up front” rationality dominates, frequently as rationalization presented as rationality. The front is open to public scrutiny, but it is not the whole story and, typically, not even its most important part. Backstage, hidden from public view, it is power and rationalization which dominate. A rationalized front does not necessarily imply dishonesty. It is not unusual to find individuals, organizations, and whole societies actually believing their own rationalizations. Nietzsche, in fact, claims this self-delusion to be part of the will to power. For Nietzsche, rationalization is necessary to survival.

Even though rationalization is a principal strategy in the rationality of power, and even though several of the most important events in the Aalborg Project have been profoundly affected by rationalization, the case study indicates that the freedom to rationalize is neither universal, inevitable, nor unlimited. All political and administrative activity cannot be reduced to rationalization; different degrees of rationalization exist; and rationalizations can be challenged – both rationally and by means of other rationalizations.

While it is possible to challenge rationalizations, this seldom occurs in the Aalborg Project. The “untouchable” position of rationalizations may be due to the fact that rationalizations are often difficult to identify and penetrate: they are presented as rationality, and, as demonstrated in the case study, often only a thorough deconstruction of an ostensibly rational argument can reveal whether it is a rationalization. In other cases, actors may be prevented from revealing a rationalization because so much power lies behind it that critique and clarification may become futile. A final explanation for actors’ unwillingness to reveal rationalizations is that doing so may be dangerous: attempts at deconstruction and critique may lead to confrontations, to the destabilization of the decision-making process, or to negative sanctions on those actors who reveal rationality as rationalization.

PROPOSITION 4: *The greater the power, the less the rationality*

Kant said, “The possession of power unavoidably spoils the free use of reason.”⁶ On the basis of the Aalborg study, we may expand on Kant by observing that the possession of more power appears to spoil reason even more.

One of the privileges of power, and an integral part of its rationality, is the freedom to define reality. The greater the power, the greater the freedom in this respect, and the less need for power to understand how reality is “really” constructed. The absence of rational arguments and factual documentation in support of certain actions may be more important indicators of power than arguments and documentation produced. Power knows that which Nietzsche calls “the doctrine of Hamlet,” that is, the fact that often “[k]nowledge kills action; action requires the veils of illusion.”⁷ A party’s unwillingness to present rational argument or documentation may quite simply indicate its freedom to act and its freedom to define reality.

In a democratic society, rational argument is one of the few forms of power the powerless still possess. This may explain the enormous appeal of the Enlightenment project to those outside power. Machiavelli, however, places little trust in rational persuasion. “We must distinguish,” he says in *The Prince*, “between . . . those who to achieve their purpose can force the issue and those who must use persuasion. In the second case, they always come to grief.”⁸ “Always” may be somewhat exaggerated, and much has changed in terms of Enlightenment and modernity since Machiavelli.

Nevertheless, Machiavelli's analysis certainly applies to the Aalborg Project, which in this sense is premodern and predemocratic.

Nietzsche puts an interesting twist on the proposition "the greater the power, the less the rationality" by directly linking power and stupidity: "Coming to power is a costly business," Nietzsche says, "power *makes stupid*" (emphasis in original).⁹ Nietzsche adds that "politics devours all seriousness for really intellectual things." In a critique of Charles Darwin, Nietzsche further points out that for human beings the outcome of the struggle for survival will be the opposite of that "desired" by Darwinism because "Darwin forgot the mind," and because "[h]e who possesses strength divests himself of mind."¹⁰ Nietzsche identified the marginalization of mind and intellect by power as a central problem for the German *Reich*, and on this basis he predicted – correctly, we now know – the fall of the *Reich*.¹¹ Aalborg's mayor also suffered from the marginalization of mind by power, something which ultimately cost him his political life. Will to power is a will to life, but it may well lead to self-destruction.

In sum, what we see in Aalborg is not only, and not primarily, a general "will to knowledge" but also "a far more powerful will: the will to ignorance, to the uncertain, to the untrue! Not as [will to knowledge's] opposite but – as its refinement!"¹² Power, quite simply, often finds ignorance, deception, self-deception, rationalizations, and lies more useful for its purposes than truth and rationality. Yet Nietzsche is wrong when he says, "Who alone has good reason to lie his way out of reality? He who suffers from it. But to suffer from reality is to be a piece of reality that has come to grief."¹³ What makes Nietzsche wrong here is the "alone" in the first sentence of the quote. In Aalborg, we have come across other groups that have good reasons to lie and rationalize, groups that do not suffer from reality. These are groups that stand to gain from propagating certain interpretations, rationalizations, and lies about reality and that use politics to create the reality they want. When it comes to politics, even Plato – the ultimate defender of rationality – recommended the "noble lie," that is, the lie which would be told to the citizens of his model state in order to support its moral and political order.¹⁴

PROPOSITION 5: Stable power relations are more typical of politics, administration, and planning than antagonistic confrontations

Michel Foucault characterizes power relations as dynamic and reciprocal: stable power relations can at any time evolve into antagonistic confrontations, and vice versa. The data from Aalborg confirm Foucault's conclusion, but we must also modify it by noting that the reciprocal relationship between stable power relations and antagonistic confrontations is asymmetrical: stable power relations are far more typical than antagonistic confrontations, much as peace is more typical than war in modern societies. Antagonistic confrontations are actively avoided. When such confrontations take place, they are quickly transformed into stable power relations. The result is that the issues shaping politics, administration, and planning are defined more by stable power relations than by antagonistic confrontations.

Because confrontations often are more visible than stable power relations, confrontations tend to be frequent topics of research on power and of public debate and press coverage. Concentration on the most visible aspects of power, however, results in an incomplete and biased picture of power relations.

PROPOSITION 6: *Power relations are constantly being produced and reproduced*

Even the most stable power relations, those with historical roots going back several centuries, are not immutable in form or content. Power relations are constantly changing. They demand constant maintenance, cultivation, and reproduction. In the Aalborg case (as described in the volume from which this chapter is drawn) the business community was much more conscious of this – and substantially more skilled and persevering – than were politicians, administrators, and planners. Through decades and centuries of careful maintenance, cultivation, and reproduction of power relations, business created a semi-institutionalized position for itself with more aptitude to influence governmental rationality than was found with democratically elected bodies of government.

PROPOSITION 7: *The rationality of power has deeper historical roots than the power of rationality*

From the historical perspective of what Fernand Braudel and the French *Annales* school call the *longue durée*, ideas like democracy, rationality, and neutrality, all central to modern institutions, are young and fragile when compared to traditions of class and privilege. In the Aalborg study, centuries of daily practice have made the latter so firmly entrenched in social institutions that they have become part of modern institutions. Policy, administration, and planning in the Aalborg Project are marked as much by premodern relations of power as by modern rationality, by tribalism as much as by democracy. This is despite the fact that the very *raison d'être* of modernity has been to eliminate, or attenuate, the influence of tradition, tribe, class, and privilege, and even though modernization has been going on for more than two centuries. One consequence of this state of affairs is what by modern standards is called the “abuse of power” in modern institutions.

Modern institutions and modern ideas such as democracy and rationality remain in large part ideals or hope. Such ideals cannot be implemented once and for all. We again need to remember that to call governments “democratic” is always a misleading piece of propaganda.¹⁵ We may want the democratic element in government to grow greater, but it is still only an element. Efforts at implementing democracy are a constant, never-ending task existing in conflict with traditions and modernist initiatives gives rise to new traditions. In this sense, modernity and democracy must be seen as part of power, not the end points of power. Modernity and democracy do not “liberate man in his own being,” nor do they free individuals from being governed, as Foucault says. Modernity and democracy undermine religion and tradition and compel man “to face the task of producing himself,” and of practicing government that will not obstruct, but will instead advance, “the undefined” – and never-ending – “work of freedom.”¹⁶

PROPOSITION 8: *In open confrontation, rationality yields to power*

Foucault says that knowledge–power and rationality–power relations exist everywhere. This is confirmed by our study, but modified by the finding that where power relations take the form of open, antagonistic confrontations, power-to-power relations dominate over knowledge–power and rationality–power relations; that is, knowledge and rationality carry little or no weight in these instances. As the proverb has it, “Truth is the first casualty of war.”

In an open confrontation, actions are dictated by what works most effectively to defeat the adversary in the specific situation. In such confrontations, use of naked power tends to be more effective than any appeal to objectivity, facts, knowledge, or rationality, even though feigned versions of the latter, that is, rationalizations, may be used to legitimize naked power.

The proposition that rationality yields to power in open confrontations may be seen as an extreme case of proposition no.4, “the greater the power, the less the rationality”: Rationality yields completely, or almost completely, to power in open, antagonistic confrontation because it is here that naked power can be exercised most freely.

PROPOSITION 9: Rationality–power relations are more characteristic of stable power relations than of confrontations

Interactions between rationality and power tend to stabilize power relations and often even constitute them. This stabilization process can be explained by the fact that decisions taken as part of rationality–power relations may be rationally informed, thereby gaining more legitimacy and a higher degree of consensus than “decisions” based on naked power-to-power confrontations.

Stable power relations, however, are not necessarily *equally balanced* power relations, understood as relations in which the involved parties act on equal terms. In other words, stability does not imply justice, and stable power relations imply neither “non-coercive [*zwanglos*] communication” nor “communicative rationality,” to use Habermas’s terms. Stable power relations may entail no more than a working consensus with unequal relations of dominance, which may lead to distortions in the production and use of rational or quasi-rational arguments. Where rational considerations play a role, however, they typically do so in the context of stable power relations.

PROPOSITION 10: The power of rationality is embedded in stable power relations rather than in confrontations

Confrontations are part of the rationality of power, not the power of rationality. Because rationality yields to power in open, antagonistic confrontations, the power of rationality, that is, the force of reason, is weak or nonexistent here. The force of reason gains maximum effect in stable power relations characterized by negotiations and consensus seeking. Hence, the power of rationality can be maintained only insofar as power relations are kept nonantagonistic and stable.

Special interest groups have substantially more freedom to use and to benefit from the full gamut of instruments in naked power play than do democratically elected governments. Democratic government of the modern Western variety is formally and legally based on rational argument and is constrained to operate within the framework of stable power relations, even when dealing with antagonistic interest groups, unless such groups go on to break the law and trigger police or military intervention. This difference in the mode of operation of governments and interest groups results in an unequal relationship between governmental rationality and private power, and between formal politics and *Realpolitik*, such that governmental rationality and formal politics end up in the weaker position. Inequality between rationality and power can be seen as a general weakness of democracy in the short-run struggle over specific policies and outcomes. It is a weakness, however, that cannot be overcome by resorting to the instruments of naked power, and modern democracy’s ability to limit its use of naked power can be seen as its general strength.

The fact that the power of rationality emerges mostly in the absence of confrontation and naked power makes rationality appear as a relatively fragile phenomenon; the power of rationality is weak. If we want the power of reasoned argument to increase in the local, national, or international community, then rationality must be secured. Achieving this increase involves long term strategies and tactics which would constrict the space for the exercise of naked power and *Realpolitik* in social and political affairs. Rationality, knowledge, and truth are closely associated. "The problem of truth," says Foucault, is "the most general of political problems."¹⁷ The task of speaking the truth is "endless," according to Foucault, who adds that "no power can avoid the obligation to respect this task in all its complexity, unless it imposes silence and servitude."¹⁸ Herein lies the power of rationality.

The Challenge to Democracy

In sum, while power produces rationality and rationality produces power, their relationship is asymmetrical. Power has a clear tendency to dominate rationality in the dynamic and overlapping relationship between the two. Paraphrasing Pascal, one could say that power has a rationality that rationality does not know. Rationality, on the other hand, does not have a power that power does not know.

Modernity relies on rationality as the main means for making democracy work. But if the interrelations between rationality and power are even remotely close to the asymmetrical relationship depicted above – which Aalborg and the tradition from Thucydides, Machiavelli, and Nietzsche tell us they are – then rationality is such a weak form of power that democracy built on rationality will be weak, too. The asymmetry between rationality and power described in the ten propositions makes for a fundamental weakness of modernity and modern politics, administration and planning. The normative emphasis on rationality leaves the modern project ignorant of how power works and therefore open to being dominated by power. Relying on rationality therefore risks exacerbating the very problems modernity attempts to solve. Given the problems and risks of our time – environmental, social, demographic; globally and locally – I suggest we consider whether we can afford to continue this fundamental weakness of modernity. The first step in moving beyond the modern weakness is to understand power, and when we understand power we see that we cannot rely solely on democracy based on rationality to solve our problems.

Let us probe this point at a more concrete level. Constitution writing and institutional reform are the main means of action, in theory as well as in practice, in the modernist strategy of developing democracy by relying on rationality against power.¹⁹ Whereas constitution writing and institutional reform may often be essential to democratic development, the idea that such reform alters practice is a hypothesis, not an axiom. The problem with many advocates of institutional reform is that they reverse the axiom and the hypothesis: they take for granted that which should be subjected to empirical and historical test. In Aalborg such testing showed us that even the police – supposedly the guard of the law – refused to follow and enforce the constitutional principles institutionalists rely upon to promote democracy, not to speak of the many other actors in the case who again and again, for personal and group advantage, violated the principles of democratic behavior they were supposed to honor as civil servants, politicians, and citizens in one of the oldest

democracies in the world. We saw, in fact, that political actors are expert at judging how far a democratic constitution can be bent and used, or simply ignored, in nondemocratic ways. Such findings demonstrate that the question of how existing constitutions and their associated institutions can be utilized more democratically may frequently be more pressing than the question of how to establish more democratic constitutions and institutions as such. The Aalborg study certainly confirms Robert Putnam's general observation that "[t]wo centuries of constitution-writing around the world warn us... that designers of new institutions are often writing on water."²⁰

Putnam's study of civic traditions in modern Italy is one of the few other studies of the practices of democracy combining a micro approach with the historical perspective of the *longue durée*, the very long run. Like the Aalborg study, Putnam and his associates find that social context and history profoundly condition the effectiveness of institutions; premodern social practices that go back several centuries drastically limit the possibilities for implementing modern democratic reform. Such conditioning is not only a problem for democracy in Italy and Denmark. In most societies entrenched practices of class and privilege form part of the social and political context and limit the possibilities of democratic change. Putnam notes that the effect of deep historical roots on the possibilities of modern democracy is a "depressing observation" for those who view constitutional and institutional reform as the main strategy for political change.²¹ Nevertheless, such is currently the evidence. This does not mean, needless to say, that changing formal institutions cannot change political practice. It does mean, however, that institutional change typically moves much more slowly and circuitously than is often assumed by legal writers and institutional reformists.

But looking at democracy in the time perspective of the *longue durée* is only depressing to those impatient for instant change. For it is also by employing this time perspective that we begin to see what it takes to make democracy work in practice. It is in this perspective we see that people working for more democracy form part of a century-long and remarkably successful practical tradition that focuses on more participation, more transparency, and more civic reciprocity in public decision making. The fact that progress has generally been slow within the tradition by no means makes such progress less significant; quite the opposite. The tradition shows us that forms of participation that are practical, committed, and ready for conflict provide a superior paradigm of democratic virtue than forms of participation that are discursive, detached, and consensus-dependent, that is, rational. We see that in order to enable democratic thinking and the public sphere to make a real contribution to democratic action, one has to tie them back to precisely what they cannot accept in much of modern democratic theory: power, conflict, and partisanship, as has been done with the Aalborg study.²²

In the *longue durée*, we see that in practice democratic progress is chiefly achieved not by constitutional and institutional reform alone but by facing the mechanisms of power and the practices of class and privilege more directly, often head-on: if you want to participate in politics but find the possibilities for doing so constricting, then you team up with like-minded people and you fight for what you want, utilizing the means that work in your context to undermine those who try to limit participation. If you want to know what is going on in politics but find little transparency, you do the same. If you want more civic reciprocity in political affairs, you work for civic virtues becoming worthy of praise and others becoming undesirable. At times direct

power struggle over specific issues works best; on other occasions changing the ground rules for such struggle is necessary, which is where constitutional and institutional reform come in; and sometimes writing genealogies and case histories like the Aalborg study, that is, laying open the relationships between rationality and power, will help achieve the desired results. More often it takes a combination of all three, in addition to the blessings of beneficial circumstance and pure luck. Democracy in practice is that simple and that difficult.

Let us return one final time to Machiavelli's warning about the dangers of the normative attitude: "[A] man who neglects what is actually done for what should be done learns the way to self-destruction."²³ The focus of modernity and modern democracy has always been on "what should be done," on normative rationality. What I suggest is a reorientation toward the first half of Machiavelli's dictum, "what is actually done," toward *verita effettuale*. We need to rethink and recast the projects of modernity and democracy, and of modern politics, administration, and planning, in terms of not only rationality but of rationality and power, *Realtionalität*. Instead of thinking of modernity and democracy as rational means for dissolving power, we need to see them as practical attempts at regulating power and domination. When we do this we obtain a better grasp of what modernity and democracy are in practice and what it takes to change them for the better. . . .

NOTES

- 1 Svend Søholt, "Miljø, Trafik og Demokrati," *Byplan* 42, no. 2 (1990), p. 60.
- 2 Charles Taylor, "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man," in Paul Rabinow and William M. Sullivan, eds., *Interpretive Social Science: A Second Look* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p. 72.
- 3 Robert Dahl and most other students of power, be they pluralist, elitist, or Marxist in their orientation, begin their analyses by posing the Weberian question, "Who governs?" [Here] we ask, "What 'governmental rationalities' are at work when those who govern govern?" This does not mean that we evade the Weberian question. . . . the fate of the Aalborg Project was decided by a tiny elite of top-level politicians, high-ranking civil servants, and business community leaders. The study uncovered an informal, hidden business-government "council" in which decisions about the Aalborg Project – and about other policies and plans of interest to the business community – were negotiated and enacted in corporative fashion before anyone else had a say over such decisions. Business interests also gained special weight in the Aalborg Project because of strong and coordinated support by the local press and the police. This is not to say that all decisions benefited the business community. Nevertheless, the trend in the overall pattern of decisions that comprise the Aalborg Project – from its genesis, through design and ratification, to implementation and operation – indicates a clear and irrefutable preference for business interests as a result of the initiatives by the business community. Democratically elected bodies of government such as the City Council, the magistrate, and political committees had very little influence. They merely rubber-stamped decisions already made elsewhere. Other community groups beside the business community lacked influence on outcomes, as did the general public. In sum, by democratic standards, and understood in terms of conventional power theory, decisions regarding the Aalborg Project were made by too few and the wrong parties. Read in this way, the Aalborg case can be seen as refuting pluralist power theories of the type propounded by Dahl and others and as corroborating

theories of a more elitist and corporatist orientation such as those developed by C. Wright Mills, Floyd Hunter, and Nicolas Poulantzas (Robert A. Dahl, *Who Governs?: Democracy and Power in an American City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961). See also Dahl's updated reflections in "Rethinking *Who Governs?*," in Robert Waste, ed., *Community Power: Directions for Future Research* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1986); C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956); Floyd Hunter, *Community Power Structure* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1953), and Hunter, *Community Power Succession: Atlanta's Policy Makers Revisited* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980). See also G. William Domhoff, *Who Really Rules? New Haven and Community Power Reexamined* (Santa Monica, Calif.: Goodyear Publishing Company, 1978); Nicolas Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes* (London: NLB, 1973); Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism* (London: NLB, 1979)). The question of "Who governs?" has been addressed in numerous other studies, many of which have emerged with similar conclusions. This is one reason why [here], instead of focusing mainly on the "who" and "where" of power, we have focused on the more dynamic question of "how" power is exercised and on the relationships between rationality and power. The latter questions have been studied and answered much less frequently than "Who governs?"

- 4 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), p. 342 (§643); Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), p. 77 (§2.12).
- 5 Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987), pp. 297–98. Habermas sees consensus seeking and freedom from domination as universally inherent as forces in human communication, and he emphasizes these particular aspects in his discourse ethics. Other important social thinkers have tended to emphasize the exact opposite. Machiavelli, e.g., whom students of politics do not hesitate to call a "most worthy humanist" and "distinctly modern," and whom, like Habermas, is concerned with "the business of good government," states: "One can make this generalization about men: they are ungrateful, fickle, liars, and deceivers" (Bernard Crick, "Preface" and "Introduction" to Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Discourses* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), pp. 12, 17; Machiavelli, *The Prince* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), p. 96 (chap. 17). Less radically, but still in clear contrast to Habermas, are observations by Nietzsche, Foucault, Derrida, and others that communication is at all times already penetrated by power. Whether the communicative or rhetorical position is "correct" is not the most important starting point for understanding rationality and power, even though the Aalborg study clearly supports the latter. What is decisive, rather, is that a nonidealistic point of departure must take account of the fact that in actual communication both positions are possible, and even simultaneously possible. In an empirical-scientific context, the question of communicative rationality versus rhetoric must therefore remain open for test. To assume either position *ex ante* based on a Kierkegaardian "leap of faith," to universalize it, and build a theory upon it makes for speculative philosophy and social science. Without placing Habermas's discourse ethics in the same league as Marxism, it may be said that the problem with discourse ethics is similar to that of some forms of Marxism in the sense that when it comes to organizing a better society, both Marx and Habermas have no account of how to deal with human evil; both assume that the good in human beings will dominate. In effect, this assumption tends to turn both lines of thinking into dogma. It is also what makes them potentially dangerous. History teaches us that assuming the nonexistence of evil may instead give free reign to evil. Nietzsche acutely observes about "[t]his mode of thought" that it "advises taking the side of the good, it desires that the good should renounce and oppose the evil down to its ultimate roots – it therewith actually denies life, which has in all its instincts both Yes and No." "Perhaps," says Nietzsche, "there has

- never before been a more dangerous ideology – than this will to good” (*The Will to Power*, pp. 192–93 (§351)). The evidence of the Aalborg case is on the side of Foucault when, in a comment on Habermas, he observes that the problem is not one of trying to dissolve relations of power in the “utopia of a perfectly transparent communication” but to give the rules of law, the techniques of management, and also the ethics which would “allow these games of power to be played with a minimum of domination” (Michel Foucault, “The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom,” in James Bernauer and David Rasmussen, eds., *The Final Foucault* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988), p. 18). For more on the issues covered in this note, see my paper, “Empowering Civil Society: Habermas, Foucault, and the Question of Conflict,” paper for symposium in Celebration of John Friedmann, School of Public Policy and Social Research, University of California, Los Angeles, April 11–13, 1996.
- 6 Here quoted from Timothy Garton Ash, “Prague: Intellectuals and Politicians,” *New York Review of Books* 42, no. 1 (1995), p. 39.
 - 7 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), p. 60 (§7).
 - 8 Machiavelli, *The Prince*, pp. 51–52 (chap. 6).
 - 9 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 60 (§1).
 - 10 *Ibid.*, p. 76 (§14).
 - 11 *Ibid.*
 - 12 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), p. 35 (§24).
 - 13 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, in Walter Kaufmann, ed., *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Penguin, 1968), p. 582 (§15).
 - 14 “[T]he rulers of our community: they can lie for the good of the community,” from Plato, *Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 83 (bk. 3, sec. 389).
 - 15 Bernard Crick, “Introduction” to Machiavelli, *The Discourses*, p. 27.
 - 16 Michel Foucault, “What Is Enlightenment?,” in Paul Rabinow, ed., *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), pp. 42, 46.
 - 17 Michel Foucault, “Questions of Method: An Interview,” *I&C*, no. 8 (Spring 1981), p. 11.
 - 18 Michel Foucault, “The Regard for Truth,” *Art and Text*, no. 16 (1984), p. 31.
 - 19 A prominent current example of the reliance on constitution writing and institutional reform for democratic progress is Habermas’s trust in *Vervassungspatriotismus* (constitutional patriotism) as a main means to have the democratic principles of his discourse ethics take root in society. See Habermas, *Justification and Application: Remarks on Discourse Ethics* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993); “Burdens of the Double Past,” *Dissent* 41, no. 4; and Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity, 1996). For an analysis of Habermas’s *Vervassungspatriotismus*, see my “Empowering Civil Society.”
 - 20 Robert D. Putnam with Robert Leonardi and Raffaella Y. Nanetti, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 17.
 - 21 *Ibid.*, p. 183.
 - 22 For more on this point, see my “Empowering Civil Society.” See also Charles Spinosa, Fernando Flores, and Hubert Dreyfus, “Disclosing New Worlds: Entrepreneurship, Democratic Action, and the Cultivation of Solidarity,” *Inquiry* 38, nos. 1–2 (June 1995).
 - 23 Machiavelli, *The Prince*, p. 91 (chap. 15).

