

Power: Interpersonal, Organizational, and Global Dimensions

Wednesday, 19 September 2005

TOPIC: How do power differential arise? From social organization.

ROBERT MICHELS (1876-1936)

- born in Cologne – French/German/Belgian background
- 1st of our authors who was an actual academic scholar – studied problems of democracies and revolution, class conflict, trade unionism, mass society (large urban societies of highly mobilized populations), nationalism, role of intellectuals and elites
- his major work: *Political Parties*
- recognized for his work in formulating **the problem of oligarchy** (concentrations of power)

democracy, oligarchy, aristocracy – We use these terms, but what do they mean?

- denote differences in the **participation in governing** – how many participate and where do they come from?
- de Tocqueville's dilemma: even when there is a preference/aspiration/value for democracy, we may nonetheless get oligarchy, or oligarchy could turn into aristocracy (if become inherited and assessed as appropriate)

- ◆ **democracy** – broad, full participation of the populace (becomes representative when large numbers, thus representative democracy = republic). populace determines policies
- ◆ **oligarchy** – rule by the few, don't know whether they are chosen or not (Michels' point)
- ◆ **aristocracy** – inherited elite = few

There is an important distinction between the **description of observable phenomena vs. evaluation/preferences**. At heart of dilemma is the question, *can we describe phenomena without evaluating them?* We try, work to make explicit the constraints on description, and role of evaluation.

In many nations in the world, the people have “the right to vote/elect” = **formal, representative democracies**. The leaders should be expected to be voted in/voted out.

Oligarchy implies not only that it is a **few** people in power but that those few are **not easily controlled by the people**.

US: between 1/3 and 40% of eligible voters actually vote, more in a presidential, less in local elections. Why so low?

Attitudinal influences:

- outcome is predetermined
- insufficient choice in candidates/ policies
- people don't think they can make a difference - any particular vote/voter
- people don't think they would ultimately be affected by the choices/policies offered

- Organizational/mechanical influences:
- double hurdle for voting (register to vote, vote)
- held on a workday during business hours
- media predictions of outcomes

In Europe, up to 80-90% vote. Some places it is mandatory. Britain doesn't allow for media advertising or poll results during the last weeks before voting. All of Europe has parliamentary systems – the leader of the nation is the leader of the party that has the most people in the parliament (thus minor groups get represented in the legislature and sometimes in coalition governments).

Representation – has to do with structure of government, how we put people in positions. Access to power derives from the structure (methods) created for filling the positions.

The number of people who participate in voting or determining the government is going to distinguish the type of government. You get a different form of participation in the elections because you have a different form of organization of government.

For example, in some nations, you vote for the parties and then you fill the seats – you don't vote for a district. There are all sorts of little rules that end up producing a different picture.

Madison and others in the Constitutional Convention designed the American government to *prevent* majority rule – it was designed to keep fragmenting power to thwart the “**excesses of democracy.**” (Federalist #10)

Michels looked inside **political parties**: *How come these organizations themselves become oligarchic even when they may genuinely seek broad participation?*

◆ His starting point for his study of political parties is his **hypothesis**:

Even in organizations committed to broad participation and democratic values, there inevitably arises strong **oligarchic tendencies** that present a serious if not insuperable **threat to the realization of democracy.** (*oligarchy* here means concentrations of power in a small group)

“It is the organization which gives birth to the domination of the elected over the electors, delegates over delegators. Who says organization says oligarchy – this is the iron law of oligarchy.”

Michels had been dissatisfied with psychological explanations, arguing that the concentration of power was *not* due to a desire of power by the leaders, nor to the subservience of the people

- emphasized **material/behavioral constraints** that come from **different structures of organization** (organization = arrangement of roles and responsibilities over time and how they are coordinated)
- as organizations develop and as they try to fulfill their **functions/purposes**, they need to make rapid decisions – they have difficulty with communicating with all members as they grow
- as the tasks they take on become more complex and the division of labor becomes more

detailed, there becomes a **need for full-time activity** and all of this means that **power will flow to fewer people**

- from the **knowledge and skill** that comes from doing the job regularly, **leadership develops** and this leadership ends up being deferred to and aware of its own capacities – *that's how we get oligarchy.*

e.g. 1970s – many memoirs and journalism addressed how organizations of civil rights, women's movement, anti-war movement, etc. became oligarchic *despite* their advocacy and energy in promoting “democratic values.” In many ways similar to De Tocqueville's analysis.

e.g. Sarah Davidson worked with **women's consciousness raising groups** – women would talk about their lives/experiences and realize that despite their differences, different situations, cultures, occupations, races, etc., they all shared certain experiences of subordination, despite what seemed to be different settings.

- After a while those with college educations as well as writers came to dominate over the group. Those who had these skills became the **voices** for those who did not – so women were subordinated even *within* these women's groups.
- **Those with skills that are valued become the overseers of those who lack the skills.**

e.g. China's Cultural Revolution (see last lecture) was the recognition of this -- knowledge/skill being the nexus of power. China was being run by the educated/intellectuals and peasants still didn't have same life chances as urbanites.

This is the same problem that happens over and over again... Will new information technologies reverse this direction?

Michel's point: the deviation by the leaders from the norm, the movement from democracy to oligarchy, was not a product of the desire for power (at least originally). Nor do the leaders believe that oligarchy is better or that they are better people. They violate democratic values and concentrate power not because they desire to do so but because they conform to other norms, to norms of efficiency, skill, communication. Those who have these capacities and desire to communicate, end up being in control.

Where do power differentials come from?

Michels argues they come from the **need to organize activities**, to coordinate, and this leads to concentrations of power.

Do organizational concentrations of power lead to inherited inequality?

Example. E. DIGBY BALTZELL – sociologist who wrote *From Aristocracy to Caste* (sometimes called *The Protestant Establishment*) about 19th to early 20th century American politics.

caste – formal social stratification based on inherited position

Baltzell argued that **American leadership** shifted from an **aristocracy of talent** to a **caste**

- the leadership that arose in the 18th century arose from *talent*
- in the course of the 19th century, it became a *caste* – wealth and religion were favored instead

of talent or virtue

- Protestant elites **systematically excluded** Catholics and Jews from entry to institutions and organizations that would provide **access to leadership**.
- Jefferson thought that there should be an **aristocracy of virtue** – the farmers! But what you got over time were people who made a lot of money and didn't want to let anyone else into the elite circle. They defined their status not by achievement but by virtue defined by religion and family inheritance. When we think about race and ethnic conflict in the US, we can observe the historic shifts in these patterns.

E.g. Malcolm Gladwell – writer for *The New Yorker*

- reads social science [!] and uses results in articles about analysis of everyday life
- *Why do American students have to fill out all these complicated forms to go to college?* Using the research of Jerome Karabel at UC Berkeley, Gladwell in recent New Yorker article describes this history of this practice that derives in part from the history Baltzell recounted.
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- It turns out that in the early part of 20th century, Harvard and Yale and a few other Ivy Leagues discovered that if they admitted students on the basis of test scores or grades, they ended up with a whole lot (over 20%) of Jews and Catholics instead of the rich Protestants they'd rather have.
 - Harvard's president Lowell didn't think that was a good thing for Harvard – they wouldn't be able to provide the money to support the school in the future. **Racism** was also attached to it – disparaging comments like the Catholics and Jews were lazy or unkempt (like comments about any subordinate/excluded group).
 - Instead of relying on test scores and somewhat objective (similar across groups) information, they started interviewing applicants to determine if they were the kind of people they wanted. They would record things about them, appearance, families, forms of speech. What evolved from that is the system we have now –writing essays, revealing things about the self.
 - **Assessment of character** was the point – intellectual ability alone wasn't what they were after.
 - *This is the same point as Baltzell.* The **Protestant Establishment** reproduced itself during the 20th century. Once this series of applications and interviews was instituted, the Ivy Leagues were able to reduce the number of “unwanted ethnics.”
 - Continued **selectivity**: There have always been positions set aside for certain people, e.g. children of alumni. Preference also for those from boarding schools (which is another form of prior selection on desired characteristics, e.g. wealth, family connection). After these two factors, Gladwell notes that athleticism is the most common. Application evaluators need to **build a community** and keep it going, so what else do they look for?

MAX WEBER (1864-1920)

- grew up during unification of Germany
- trained as a lawyer and economist
- never practiced any profession for very long – mostly a private scholar (obviously had sources of support)
- periodic nervous breakdowns
- one of the most important social scientists of the last 200+ years

- often described **in opposition to Marx** – great alternative to Marxist explanation of history
- was actually in opposition to lots of the common perspectives of his time, popular notions esp. those of Marx but also democratic utilitarians
- tried to keep a **middle road between democratic utilitarianism** (Mill, Bentham – point of view of the individual) **and Marxist thought** (society as the whole)
- tried to keep a middle road between entirely subjectivist (ideas, desires, e.g. utilitarians) and materialists (Marxists) conceptions of causality
- rarely will identify a single cause, like human desire/will/ideas (utilitarianism) or class struggle [something collective] or capitalism (Marx)
- gives a **range of different variables** that need to be taken into account to explain course/pattern for **social organization and development**

<p>democratic utilitarianism subjectivity, the individual John Stuart Mill, Jeremy Bentham man makes history psychological + economic desire, will, ideas historic variation</p>	<p><i>Max Weber is between these two</i></p>	<p>Marxism society, the whole Karl Marx class struggle capitalism “objective” materialist historic progression</p>
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Weber [like Simmel and Pareto] uses well defined conceptual tools. **Social action** leads to definition of **power** as intended and foreseen action. Weber’s idea begins with individual but doesn’t end there – that’s how he sits between the two wings of social theory.

Human behavior is social action when and insofar the acting individual "takes into account the behavior of others and is thereby oriented in his course." **Social action is any action when we acknowledge the action of others** – when we anticipate, imagine, respond to others (real or imagined).

Weber did not deny that some human behavior is unconscious, that we may conform unthinkingly, but he also argued that there is **rudimentary consciousness** (there is a message behind ordinary behavior).

How do we make sense of what we do? How do we understand our own action?

Weber claims to find patterns in the ways in which we orient ourselves to each other, how we attach meaning to our behavior (that makes it social action), how we make sense of it. It is **not an individual process**.

WEBER’S 4 TYPES OF SOCIAL ACTION

- ◆ **instrumental rational** – *means-ends* relationship, often “economic”
 - order activities in order to achieve something, we have purpose
 - that purpose explains what we are doing
 - external world of objects that we arrange or the relations with others make sense
 - rise of the expert society/authority

- ◆ **substantive rational** – we do things because we value them

- orient action in belief in intrinsic goodness/ aesthetic/moral/religious aspect of it
- do things for *their own sake* but not to achieve something else
- e.g. beauty

◆ **expressive** – bases of feeling, affection, emotion (“like it”)

◆ **habit/tradition** – do because it’s always been done this way, for the sake of *convention*

The above can be intentions and motives but also *meanings* that we attach to our action. We can know **intentions as a series of motives**, so Weber placed motives into the above categories.

Through time, we observe patterns in how the **distribution of action changes** in different social groups or societies

- Weber's hypothesis: **over time and across societies, human action moved from being primarily habit to increasingly instrumental rational** (hence the above arrow). (Of course the convention, habit, had to be developed in any human group)(processes of routinization)
- Through history we can observe that more and more human behavior is organized to achieve specific goals and less and less done out of habit and convention.
- This shift from habit to instrumental/rational is the **process of rationalization** – when attached to social groups and history, rationalization is *not* justification but *making something rational, subject to reason and calculation*.

Weber was the master of **multi-causality** and complex interpretations of the world.

- did *not* believe that **action could be neatly parceled** into these categories
- these are *lenses* or *colors* that are woven into the pattern of human action – **most action will have combinations** – often there is a dominance of one
- these categories are “**ideal types**” – a methodology of social science invented by Weber. *Any particular empirical action doesn’t fully encompass the conceptualized ideal; that is a logical construct.*

Weber also talks about **types of GROUP ACTION**, but had different categories. *What might be the meanings attached to group action?* Three basic orientations to group action (meanings that oriented the action) – It was not an exhaustive typology, but only meant to *begin* a description (not the only ways that groups form, but basic ways)

Groups formed on the basis of...

class – material interests

status – affinity and prestige, styles of living, values and shared feelings

power – attempts to gain access and control – “political parties”

Weberian definition of **CLASS**: members of a group who **shared a similar position in the market** of goods and employment. They had a common situation, **equal life chances**.

- Class could exist only within a **commodity market** (had to have capitalism) but class position did not necessarily lead to class-determined action in politics or in status (*but Marx will argue that they do*).
- An individual may have a certain position or certain opportunities in the economic structure but he/she may develop a different style of living or a different interest in power.

Weber’s concepts can be used in combinations and constitute the language with which many

social scientists speak about these issues.

STATUS – groups who form on the basis of **feelings of affinity**, connection, closeness

- e.g. household communities, neighborhoods, religious groups, kin.
- beliefs of what is **honorable, proper**
- **shared style of life** frequently buttressed by endogamous marriage, hospitality relations, regular interaction (what was disturbed when Harvard wanted to change student body)

The **interplay of class and status** occupies Weber most – how they work together or against each other to give distinct characters to different societies.

In *Class, Status, and Party*, Weber writes:

“Where the general place of classes is in the economic order, and status of group is in social order, these groups influence each other and they influence the legal order and in turn are influenced by that. But the place of parties is in the house of power. The party is oriented toward the acquisition of power and toward the influence of communal action wherever it may be – social, economic, or otherwise.”

Weber is the only author who offers an **explicit definition of power**, who asks *what is power?* It is his definition that Dennis Wrong amends and elaborates and that we have been working with thus far. We will, of course, elaborate, extend Wrong's definition when we pay attention to the structuring (continuing patterns) of power in and beyond interpersonal relations.

Wrong quotes Weber:

“Power is the chance of a man or a number of men to realize their own will in communal action even against the resistance of others”

Wrong's arguments and discussion are primarily about the inclusion of the phrase "the **resistance** of others." The critical issue to take from Wrong's work, however, is that the basis of power may differ and vary depending on social context, structural, and historical circumstance.

You need to know the structure to know where class or status will be influential and what the access to power may be.

Weber introduces a **pluralist notion of power** – power has many bases. This is a language with which to analyze the *distribution* of power.

Weber argues that social action is increasingly more rational than habitual – we can glean a hypothesis about where power lies from this: **Power lies with those who have the skill to manipulate the means-ends relationships** – the economy/communications systems will lie with those with the skill/expertise.