**SOC 3150: Classical Sociological Theory**

**Lecture 25: Weber on Legitimacy, Domination, & Authority 1**

* We now turn to look at Weber’s political thought, most notably his ideas on legitimacy, domination, and authority.
* Written largely between 1914-1920, much of this appears in *Economy and Society* as well as unpublished work.
* Weber was interested in two main issues during this time:

1. Developmental issues related to the decline of empires/rise of the modern state; and
2. Changes occurring in the manifestation of political authority as the modern state developed.

* Weber believed that as the state’s political organization was altered, it became dependent on bureaucratic administration, with some shift occurring between the political, religious and legal spheres.
* Weber thought that the political and legal spheres only became dominant in modern society, sweeping away the absolute monarchies, aristocracies, empires, religious domination, and impoverished social classes of the past in favor of a democratic parliamentary system, rational law, world markets, and enfranchised individuals.
* As the modern state formed around these considerations, its authority was centralized and the conduct of everyday life was rationalized. This led to new forms of political authority.
* At the center of all this is his theory of legitimate domination.

**Legitimate Domination:**

* Weber was interested in how political power manifested itself in different historical contexts, comparing forms of domination in various historic periods.
* He distinguished between power and domination: the former being the ability to carry out their will despite resistance; the latter to the right of a ruler in an established order to issue commands and expect them to obey. This latter involves a legitimate system of authority in a given social context.
* Weber considered that different systems of domination vary in how commands are issued/obedience expected in a given social order. He stressed two factors here:

(1) How legitimacy is defined (i.e. what justifies an

authority figure giving orders/why they have that right);

(2) The development of administrative staff (i.e. how

commands are enforced).

* Weber argues that each system of domination varies with respect to four characteristics:
  1. The claim it makes to legitimacy;
  2. The type of obedience it elicits;
  3. The kind of administrative staff;
  4. The way the system exercises authority.
* Given the social variations in the above in different historical settings, Weber articulated three types of legitimate domination:

1. Charismatic domination;
2. Traditional domination; and
3. Rational-legal domination.

Each of these ideal types give rise to corresponding forms of legitimacy, obedience, administrative apparatus, and mode of exercising power.

**Charismatic Domination:**

* Charismatic domination is *first* rooted in “a certain *quality* of an individual’s personality which is considered *extraordinary* and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or exceptional powers and abilities” (e.g. prophets, saviors, persons with exceptional reputations, heroes in wartime).
* Such leader’s claims to legitimacy originate in:

1. Belief in his/her extraordinary capacities/powers of personal inspiration; and
2. The degree of “felt duty” followers believe is put on them to carry out the leader’s demands (e.g. their psychological connection/inner devotion to the leader’s saving/freeing vision that induces them to suspend critical judgment).

* Weber felt that such leadership could become unstable if leaders fail in their promises or predictions. If they appear to lose their powers, are defeated in their mission, or appear thwarted by natural misfortunes, their legitimacy may fail.
* A *second* characteristic of charisma is its ability to mobilize legitimacy through a “*renunciation of the past*” (e.g. leaders rejecting the past due to some unacceptable inequality, suffering, or wrong committed against the people).
* This is due to claims of an authentic “call” to a particular mission or some “spiritual duty” to reject attachment to the routines of everyday life, for the leader to transcend these through emotional indifference, renunciation of the world, being “above” such things, and adopting an ascetic life devoted to the mission.
* Weber believed such authority often emerged in times of social crisis (e.g. when established procedures don’t solve problems, or when a “people” are on the brink of political/economic crisis). Here, such leaders mobilize significant symbols/often serve as catalysts for movements resistant to established rules and procedures and fail to take a pragmatic approach to solve the practical issues at hand.
* A *third* characteristic of charisma is the tendency to undergo *transformation* in its orientation to power (i.e. it may be necessary to change in some way, become routine, practical, adjust to the ‘normal, everyday needs and conditions of carrying on administration). Such transformation occurs:
  1. When a question arises as to the successor of the charismatic leader (do they have the same qualities?); and
  2. In transition from a charismatic administration to one more adapted to practical, everyday conditions.
* If a charismatic leader dies, 3 possible solutions obtain:

1. Search for a new leader possessing the same qualities;
2. Seek a new leader through revelation (e.g. oracles, divination, casting lots, etc).
3. Prior designation of a successor by the leader.

* As for the second situation, the process of routinization places a *strain* on maintaining a charismatic style of domination in favor of morphing into either traditional or rational/legal authority. This is due to the following considerations:

1. Charismatic authority must retain the focus on the ideal rather than the compromising demands of everyday life;
2. To ensure that charismatic revelations attesting to the leader’s powers/accomplishments are preserved, they are set into texts and subjected to legitimizing rationalities (e.g. theological exposition);
3. To ensure the transmission of the original charismatic concepts, it may be necessary to represent these not so much in terms of his/her personal qualities, but in terms of words, utterances, and commands of a doctrine.

* In terms of administration under a charismatic leader, unlike in traditional or legal domination:
  + There are no appointed officials, hierarchy of offices, or technical training of staff;
  + Appointments are not made on the basis of social privilege or dependency on the leader’s movement;
  + The leader selects disciples or followers who commit themselves to serve the leader because of their belief in his/her powers;
  + Service to the leader may be a form of sacrifice based on renunciation of their own interests in favor of the master;
  + Administrative functions are carried out by disciples rather than autonomous office holders;
  + Decision making functions/necessary judgments may be made by the leader personally, on a case by case basis, at his/her discretion/intervention;
  + The leader’s judgments take on the quality of revelation or divine inspiration/fostering compliance by personal demands, exhortation, and force of will;
  + This is far from the world of rules, procedures, and rational decision making found in legal domination.
* Yet, as noted above, this kind of situation is hard to maintain, and history is replete with examples of charismatic leadership undergoing transformation, ultimately giving way to other forms of domination/authority.
* Next class: traditional and legal authority.