**SOC 3150: Classical Sociological Theory**

**Lecture 26: Weber on Legitimacy, Domination, & Authority 2**

* Now that we have introduced Weber’s political thought, in particular his ideas on legitimacy, we continue to examine his forms of domination and authority.
* Beyond charismatic authority, Weber described two additional forms of legitimate political domination:

1. *Traditional* authority; and
2. *Rational-legal* authority.

* It is to these that we now turn.

**Traditional authority:**

* Political authority is traditional when its legitimacy is based on custom and tradition, on the “sanctity of age-old rules and powers.
* In these cases, authority is owed not to an objective system of legal rules but to a framework of obligations binding people to traditional status leaders by personal loyalties.
* Such leaders obtain their powers from inherited right seen as legitimate in light of customs and traditional norms (e.g. monarchies, feudal lords).
* The authority of such leaders is obtained in two ways:

1. By the prestige conferred by tradition and belief that the ruler’s commands are valid by virtue of his/her office /status; and
2. By virtue of the discretionary powers conferred on them by titles/ hereditary claims to power (i.e. traditional privileges/rights which tend to confer almost unlimited authority on leaders as “personal master” over “subjects”)

* Under traditional authority, leader’s commands are seen as legitimate:

1. In terms of the specific weight of customary rules which may apply in a situation;
2. By virtue of the leader’s right to exercise personal discretion (e.g. to issue edicts regardless of rules). There is no legal separation between the power of the ruler and political office.

* Under traditional authority, there are two formal types of administrative apparatus: *patrimonial* and *patriarchal*
* Patrimonial administration, common in feudal societies, is where rulers, without administrative staff per se:

-rely on family members, dependents, or, in some cases,

even slaves, to perform various duties/functions;

-tend to be have a “system of favorites” who perform

tasks out of loyalty or obligation;

-engage in arbitrary decision-making at the personal

discretion of the master rather than formal rules;

-have tasks/roles tied to household positions, to which

favorites return after the job is done;

-resist bureaucratic development based on rational rules,

functional differentiation of responsibilities, etc.

-face much pressure from outside interests, who constantly

seek favors, incomes, privileges, the ‘granting of grace,’ or

forms of remuneration or advantage;

-face the problem of ‘palace intrigues’ from family

members and favorites.

* Patriarchal administration, a variation on the above that also operates without formal administrative staff:

-is found in households where the master obtains

legitimacy and governs by rule of inheritance;

-is based on the belief that authority is exercised by ‘joint right’ and in the interest of all members;

-there is the belief that personal staff should not be retained from family members (a conflict of interest);

-power is tied to the ‘consent’ of other members of the household;

- is entirely dependent upon traditional norms and exist by force of obligatory entitlements rather than formal enactments;

-members are not subjects so much as ‘co-consenters.’

-an example would be ‘benefices,’ a type of feudalism that existed in France and Germany where large households/ landholdings allowed family members to function as subsidiaries (e.g. draw from the lord’s treasury, obtain land rights, along with appropriate taxes and dues in their areas);

-such monopolistic practices stifle the development of capitalism as there is not enough freedom to encourage private enterprise and the absence of contracts and binding legal norms discourages calculation in action;

**Legal Domination:**

* Weber’s third type of political authority is *legal*. In such cases, legitimacy rests on *rational* legal grounds, on belief in the inherent legality of enacted rules, and the right of those elevated to authority under them to issue commands.
* Compliance is owed to those issuing commands due to principles of law, not the personal authority or charisma of the leader. Obedience is owed to an impersonal legal order.
* Individuals pursue their interests within limits established by legal precepts and follow norms approved by the group governing them.
* Officials in power are themselves subject to impersonal laws and must orient their actions to these in issuing commands. Authority ultimately resides in the rules themselves.
* The form of administrative organization employed is rooted in legality and tends to be bureaucratic in nature, reflected in things like the organization of offices, staff, and official files.
* The connection between legality/legal authority and bureaucratically organized administration is central to Weber’s reasoning in several ways:

1. He saw bureaucracy as technically the most rational means of exercising authority over people, the basis of the Western democratic state;
2. In a system defined by legal precepts, offices necessarily followed an official hierarchy of offices in terms of rank, function, and specified jurisdictions;
3. Each, in turn, would be governed by a system of supervision and control so regulated by technical rules and norms that it would largely eliminate personal say-so, arbitrary exercise of power, status privilege, or force.
4. Rules and job-requirements only enable office holders to operate in a given sphere of competence based on a division of labor. Their decision making is constrained by technical training, conditions, and legal procedures.
5. Officials occupy such limited positions either through election or appointment and do not own their offices.
6. Rational legal norms require that all administrative acts be put in writing, kept on record, and be subject to review.
7. Orders are not ‘edicts’ but issued by virtue of legal statute (i.e. grounded in rational legal principles/lawful decision making, not the arbitrary judgment of a traditional ruler).
8. Laws and procedures can only be legitimately changed through fair, procedurally correct enactments and due legal process.
9. Rational-legal forms of authority are based on correct legal procedure and thus require a large administrative apparatus.

**Conclusion:**

* Over the past two classes we have reviewed a key aspect of Weber’s political thought, his comparative/historical distinction between charismatic, traditional, and rational-legal forms of authority/domination.
* It must always be remembered that each of these are portrayed as an ideal type, a sharpened image created for analytic purposes. Any actual, historic system of domination/authority in real life probably contains elements of each, but probably exhibits one far more than the others.