

# Power: Interpersonal, Organizational, and Global Dimensions

Monday, 17 October 2005

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**TOPIC:** Classical theories of power. How do differentials in power arise?

## Review of last time:

We are pursuing a more historical chronology of theories of power – our writers are regarded as forming the foundation of contemporary scholarship which often constitutes a discourse (e.g. elaboration, critique, rejection) with these writers.

So far we've covered: Machiavelli (16<sup>th</sup> century) and Hobbes (17<sup>th</sup> century)  
Today: Pareto (19<sup>th</sup> century)

Central organizing question for discussion:

***Where do inequalities of power come from and how are they maintained?***

Each one of these authors would have a position on the question of whether these inequalities come from **human nature** or from the **social organization**.

Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Pareto all argue that inequality comes from human nature, but each has slightly different account of human nature.

Hobbes' notion of power bound up with the institution of monarchy, with the British king – he was writing a justification for the absolute monarch, the metaphor he used, *Leviathan*.

- the king was Hobbes' solution to what he observed as the **problem of disorder** at the heart of human societies, at the heart of human nature
- his famous statement: life was nasty, brutish, short unless we submitted to overarching power who would contain our self interests and desires
- relationship between sovereign and subject best depicted in the picture of the king made up of his individual citizens (to the right)
- the king as the sum of all the parts of all the individuals says that *the sovereign is not his own self* – Recall Simmel who said that to be a leader you must follow. The Leviathan is sum of all people who have given all rights and property to him in return for protection
- **king exists only through his subjects** – there can't be a king without obedient subjects, but King cannot rule disobedient subject, needs allegiance and secures that allegiance by providing what subjects need - protection. Equally important each subject is clearly discernible in the body of the sovereign and is not swallowed up into an anonymous mass – each subject is a discrete individual.
- **organizing principle:** the identity where each citizen and the subject become one
- what is achieved through the **social contract** between individual and sovereign is the **basis of**



**politics** – it is through the surrender/silencing of the individual's *own* sovereignty over himself that is transformed into loyalty to the state – *the conflict among the people is silenced as it goes through the body of the king*

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- Hobbes' metaphor authorizes/legitimizes/rationalizes the idea of a political community in which each person participates in the power of the whole
- what becomes marginalized are the questions that occupy us for next 300 years: how *is* the sovereign's power organized and exercised? Hobbes doesn't address this.
- Where Machiavelli was concerned with how power works, Hobbes is interested in authorizing it but doesn't give insight into strategies.

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### VILFREDO PARETO (1848-1923) – Italian

- leading theorist in generation that produced much of modern social science
- contemporary of Weber and Durkheim
- most well known for contributions to economics
- follows in the line of Italian social thought from Machiavelli, addressing the question of how the few come to rule the many, and did this, like Machiavelli and Hobbes, by probing what he thought was the fundamental nature of humanity

*How do differences in power arise?*

Pareto was the author of the **theory of elites**: Some people are merely better at doing some things than others and differences arise because human beings have **different capacities**.

Pareto is the third theorist to say inequalities in social power are due to human nature, but he is *the first* to say that this is because some are better than others. Machiavelli and Hobbes says it's our human competitiveness in need of control. Pareto instead emphasizes that this "better" means that some people have more **skill** – today called "**human capital**." This was *not* meant as an evaluative, moral statement, simply descriptive.

He had a scale of 1-10 for objectively ranking skill – people will have more/less different capacities for different activities/skills (public speaking, athletics, writing, drawing, etc.).

Pareto was interested in what kind of skill was required for a **governing elite**, for politics (may not be the same, though, e.g. some persons/administrations may be excellent at politics - gaining office, but not so much at governing)

Of all our authors, Pareto may be our clearest/simplest. Now we explore the background on his language/terms and premises behind his work:

In order to describe the social background [to go behind the surface of social phenomena, to reveal the structure of social action], Pareto used two terms:

- ◆ **residues** = elements of social life that are constant through time and across cultures
- ◆ **derivations** = variable manifestations of these basic residues

e.g. All people have the desire to enter into social relationships – **the residue of sociality**. How we choose or learn to participate in these social activities varies enormously across time and

culture, e.g. dress, public appearance, how to meet people, how marriage is arranged, common sexual practices. But all are variations on something fundamental.

These residues are the fundamental characteristics of human behavior – Pareto classified them into 6 general types, two of which are applicable to our discussion:

- ◆ type I – **instinct for combinations**, for new arrangements, “entrepreneurship”
- ◆ type II – **group persistences** – the persistence of aggregates – those things that we make often tend to endure. Think of it as a built-in preference for the *status quo*

In human beings, we don’t have one or the other, we have both types!

### **PARETO’S CIRCULATION OF ELITES**

Pareto is famous for his theory of the circulation of elites. The distribution of these residues in the population influenced the organization of politics/economy:

- Type I residues impelled people to **system-making**, to large scale financial and political dealings, inventing new ways of doing things, to experiment, innovate, depart from the common, using **cunning**. When this is strong, people are less concerned with stability and are willing to take chances – **risk takers** whom Machiavelli called “**foxes**.”
- Type II is expressed in **conservatives** who display loyalty, risk-aversion, patriotism, solidarity, and who use **force** rather than cunning, “**lions**” rather than the “foxes.”

Economic/political life is in a **constant repetitive cycle between the lions and foxes** – in and out of the higher positions. First we get innovation, and then it is institutionalized, it becomes routine, and then we get innovation again. But the best way to govern is to have a **constant mix of innovation and conservatism** instead of the ups and downs.

In the language of economics, the instinct for combination characterizes the “speculators,” whereas the rentiers were the “landlords.” Under normal conditions speculators are kept in check because the masses are more conservative, more submissive.

**The circulation of elites was intended to suggest historically that any given society will be controlled at one time by either an innovative or a conservative group – the balance will swing from one to another.**

*Where do differences in power come from?*

According to Pareto, from **skills** – some are better than others at governing. Those few should rise to leadership – a **normative theory**. He hints at how there might be *changes* in governance – change comes about by the circulation of elites, by different skills coming to the leadership.

All three authors (Machiavelli, Hobbes, Pareto) claim that there is something about human nature that produces inequality and differences in power. If we believed all three, how might we behave as citizens, what policies might we support? According to these writers, **there will always be inequality because of human nature (not nurture!) and there will always be a**

**small number who rules over the masses. Thus, policies designed to create greater equality are futile?**

*ideology* – sets of ideas/practices about power and politics [that end up preferring one arrangement of politics/society over another]

*What does “conservative” mean at present?*

Until recently this argument would be a conservative political philosophy – conservative because it doesn't see possibilities of change – it conserves. *If human nature is the source of differences and human nature is believed to be unchanging, then the possibilities of equalizing power don't exist.* This argument of all three authors is **ideologically conservative**, not necessarily attached to political conservative of the contemporary American right.

We have to be particular with our language – stop, look inside the terms, make references empirically, and define our concepts carefully.

Example: 1970s: **conservative judicial movement** argued for interpretation based on the “original intent of constitution.”

- Judges saw in the constitutional language the conservative economics they subscribed to.
- **Felix Frankfurter** – (1930s-1950s) proponent of “judicial restraint.” FDR put Frankfurter on the Supreme Court and Frankfurter said that courts should be restrained in constraining the legislature because this is a democracy, and deference should be given to the legislature because they *too* can interpret the Constitution. Only when there was conflict should the judicial branch strike down the legislature (this allowed New Deal legislation to pass through). In 1930s this was *liberal*, but in the 1950s/60s this became *conservative*. Frankfurter had consistent philosophy of a non-activist judge, but times had changed.

The lesson: terms are up for negotiation and have to be specified.

That power differentials come from human nature is conservative in the sense of their expectations for changing those inequalities. How does this play out in contemporary evolutionary psychology? Discussion.

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Now we move to authors who say **inequalities are due to social organization**. These theories that focus on social organization do not claim that social organization changes what human beings are, it just changes the **organization of action and its consequences**.

**ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE** (1805-1859) French

De Tocqueville wrote history of France before revolution describing how the revolution came about because the French state was 'falling apart' because the bureaucracies and agencies in outlying areas were losing their connection to the central state and the monarchy.

His 1831 trip to the US was to witness the “flowering of democracy” in America, the *only* democratic state – eventually published as *Democracy in America* (1835)

- Why did democracy work in America when it failed so miserably in France?
- His trip was 40-50 years after the French revolution, and France had already gone through

several different governments, monarchy, democracy, emperorship, republic etc.

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- De Tocqueville's life and writing reveal a tension: an **ambivalence between traditional and modern values**, a French nobleman who desires democracy
- Convinced of **irreversible trend** in human history toward democracy
- Contemptuous of French reactionaries who would bring back the idea of monarchy when a particular democratic government struggles, or fails.
- But also obsessed with **erosion of traditional context, daily life and values** – the aristocratic values of honor, of caring about the land, of local culture – he believed that European liberalism rested upon these traditional values

His master observation concerning European history was the relentless **leveling of social ranks**.

- over time, differences between people (education, property, ways they lived) became diluted
- ranks became fewer and more alike – **social distance was shrinking**

de Tocqueville explored the basis of egalitarianism, how did stratification develop, analyzed the emerging industrialization in Europe and the US, specifically the **concentrations of power...**

*What kinds of power would emerge in these new democratic societies?*

His argument poses a paradox/dilemma, or “dialectic” as Marx will say.

Democracy involved the **gradual leveling of differences**, leading not only to greater equality but also inevitably increased and accelerated bureaucracy and bureaucratization too. **Bureaucracy would undermine democracy** (Weber, Michels all address this too).

Bureaucracy = organization of offices. These offices would someday undermine the people's participation in governance.

*Why would democracy lead to bureaucracy?*

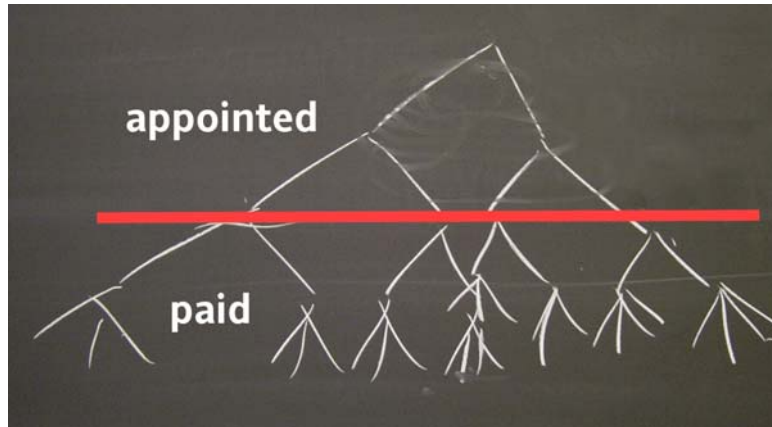
In democracy, we don't want the nobles/elite to be in top positions – so we create **paid public service**. *Bureaucracies are organizations of paid functionaries*. This increased under democracies because unpaid political service can be performed only by the rich/privileged. The existence of such a class [who donates their labor and serves as political agents] *opposes* and frustrates the idea of democracy. Where you have a rich/privileged class occupying public office, you are less likely to have a democracy. (Notice trend in contemporary politics; % of Congressmen and Senators who are millionaires.)

de Toqueville said “it is possible to measure the progress of democracy by noting the rate of increase in paid functionaries.”

Jacksonian democracy – Jackson was the first president that was not elite (he was a soldier)

- when president, he filled his administration with friends and paid them – supposed origins of the patronage system
- **life long positions were taken out of politics and changed into civil service**

There is a **division of labor** in bureaucracy – each reports up. Up until a certain point, there is paid civil service. Above that there are appointed positions. If paid, then other people will want those jobs – and this makes the bureaucracy bigger and bigger. Contemporary federal government:



4 things that accounted for variations in the **centralization of bureaucracy**:

- if government came to power through **revolution**, then there would initially be concentrated power in order to sustain the revolution
- **lower classes** wanted to get power from aristocrats – tended toward centralization
- level of **literacy** – greater concentration in educated elite
- **war** – those fond of war are fond of centralization and vice versa

*Why does bureaucracy lead to concentration/centralization of power? Why can't we produce rotating leadership? Why must bureaucracy undermine democracy?*

**The division of labor itself will cause inequality!** Forget about how upper positions are appointed or get their positions. The division of labor creates inequality because *those at the bottom have simple, monotonous jobs while those higher up in the hierarchy have to take the view of the whole.*

Consider a factory where there is an assembly line of each task and each worker continually does one repetitive task. But someone else at the top had to conceive of the process from beginning to end, in contrast to those who work in only one part of the system. There is a distinction between **those who manage vs. those who do** (whose capacities/skills would eventually be reduced by the simple monotony). At the top, the managers' capacities would increase as they take a wider scope of things. **Stratification** of those who *do* vs. those who *think* until they are no longer interchangeable, e.g. McDonalds and infinitely replaceable labor.

**Manual labor vs. intellectual labor** that causes inequality! e.g. higher education sorts those who will work minimum wage from those who will not (except for some very high skilled manual labor, e.g. some construction work)

The **complexity of functions** will distinguish the people and their capacities. Those who are more able are attracted to the higher positions. This setup erodes the skills of the lower positions. Thus, it segregates!

Example: China and the Cultural Revolution

- Mao instituted centralized government, tried to undo thousands of years of subordination of Chinese peasantry and poverty
  - 1960s: awareness of that intellectual elite was developing in the cities/government/university; cultural revolution: wanted to break down inequality of those who think vs. those who do; an effort to equalize – take intellectuals and send them to the countryside to work in fields. There was also turmoil, violence, group pressure to conform and confess their elitism.
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**Summary**

Democracy, despite its aspirations for equality, leads to concentrations of power because of bureaucracy (paid service) and because of the inevitable division of labor in large scale organization. Differences in power come from the division in labor, from the increasing specialization and centralization that is necessary to organize activities.

de Tocqueville, Weber, Michels all argue that concentrations of power arise irrespective of the ownership of industry. It is the division of labor and the hierarchal organization that creates inequality.