

21a.245

Third Class

1. Review definition (#1) of power as “the capacity of some persons to achieve foreseen and intended effects on others.”

distinguish social action from interaction (communication between parties)  
consequential social interaction, having an effect (influence) from power  
(intending that effect)

2. Notice that if one fails to distinguish some action as power (intended and foreseen effects on others), then one tends to adopt an “oversocialized” conception of people’s actions (Wrong) and misses aspects of resistance in social interaction.

3. Identify role of intentions in definition of power.

distinguish diffuse vs. specific intentions  
individual intentions  
group intentions (culture, socialization....)  
role of institutions, rules and roles as sources of power

what is the role of human mind in action

Examples:

Neighbors A/B

Space Ship

Traffic lights and cars

Policeperson and drivers

Senator and President

4. Studying human social action: Weber, two modes of explanation.

5. Debates in the study of power rest on where to draw the line between institutional roles and rules versus specific human intention. Drawing the line close vs. opening the possibility of institutionalized constraint.

6. Georg Simmel (1858-1918) contribution to the study of power.

reductionism: society is the sum total of all interactions

relationism: all of social life is interdependent, function of the interaction of the parts

Spent most of career describing the variation and forms of social interactions: division of labor, in-group/out-group relations, superordination/subordination

“Power conceals an interaction, an exchange ... which transforms the pure one-sidedness of superordination and subordination into a sociological form.”

Symbols:

- 0 = powerless, no resources
- = some power, some resources
- + = more power, more resources
- ∞ = infinite, all power, all resources

Power is a relationship, an interaction between A and B:

A ←→ B

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| 0 | 0 | neither party effects or influences the other, a very rare situation, <u>not a social interaction</u>   |
| - | + | B is more powerful than A   |
| + | - | A is more powerful than B   |
| - | - | A and B are equal   |
| + | + | A and B are equal   |
| + | 0 | A is much more powerful than B; but where B has no resources, no power at all, <u>A's power is large but nonetheless limited</u> , because B is without resources, unable to respond. A cannot demand anything or everything from B and therefore A receives little back, little compliance, little action. |
| ∞ | 0 | According to Simmel, it is not possible for one party to be all powerful and the other to be completely powerless, because as illustrated above, A's power is limited to what B can do, respond, perform. Thus, according to Simmel, <u>this is not a possible social situation</u> .                       |
| ∞ | - | This is a possible situation where A is almost totally powerful, but still B has some power, not completely powerless.  |